



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

### Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

### About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>







John Gardner  
1268

256 e. 18023



First Edition?

15

THE  
  
HEIR OF BEECH HALL,  
  
AND OTHER TALES,

---

BY  
S. E. ROOKES.

---

EXETER  
PRINTED AT THE DEVON WEEKLY TIMES OFFICE, 226, HIGH STREET.

—  
1868.





THESE TALES WERE WRITTEN FOR THE "WESTERN WEEKLY  
NEWS," AND ARE RE-PRINTED BY THE KIND PERMISSION OF THE  
PROPRIETORS FROM THE COLUMNS OF THAT PAPER.

# THE HEIR OF BEECH HALL.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### A NEW INMATE.

The dining-room at Beech Hall looked invitingly comfortable on the cold January night. The crimson curtains closely drawn across the wide ancient latticed windows, with their broad stone mullions, and panes of antique stained glass ; the fire-place piled up with logs of blazing wood ; the great curly black retriever stretched at full length before the fire ; and on the table preparations laid for a substantial meal ; all this would have appeared very grateful to a traveller who had been exposed to the sharp air of the frosty night. On the sofa, in evening costume, but wearing a magnificent Indian shawl closely wrapped round her shoulders, lay a lady apparently between twenty and thirty years of age, who might have been pronounced extremely handsome, but for a somewhat sallow complexion, and an expression of languid irritability, denoting indolence or ill-health. A beautiful boy, wearing a dress of Scotch plaid of a costly material and brilliant colours, displaying a neck and arms delicately fair, and beautifully rounded, with a broad scarlet sash round his waist, and long ringlets of golden hair falling over his shoulders, was amusing himself by drawing a large wooden horse about the room, and endeavouring to arouse the great dog to join him in his play. The child was in his seventh year, though from the manner in which he was dressed, he appeared to be much younger. The lady looked at her watch with a gesture of impatience.

"Ring the bell, Lionel, my love ; I think I heard the carriage coming up the avenue."

The boy laid hold of the dog's ear, and pulled it roughly.

"Get up, Nip, you lazy thing—will you ?"

"Did you hear, my darling ? Ring the bell. Papa is coming."

"I can't," said the child in a fretful tone, "I'm busy with Nip."

"Oh! fie, Lionel. You'll spoil your pretty curls if you roll on the hearth rug—then what will papa say?"

The lady partly rose, with the intention of ringing the bell herself; then a loud double knock at the front door startled her, and she sank back into her former position.

"Oh dear! It makes one so nervous. I wish Thomas would learn to knock quietly. Where can my *vinaigrette* be? Lionel, my pet, here is papa."

The door was opened and a fine, gentlemanly-looking man of middle age entered hastily, and embraced the lady, who had exerted herself so far as to rise from the sofa to meet him.

"Well, Godfrey," she said, "I am glad you are come at last. I was getting dreadfully anxious. You can't think how I have suffered from palpitation, and that terrible nervous affection of my head."

"I have not delayed longer than was absolutely necessary, Bella, dear. And so you are here, master Lionel? How is my darling boy?" And he lifted up the pretty child who had been clinging round his knees, and kissed him tenderly. "Are you glad to see papa?"

"Yes, yes. Where are my new toys? What have you brought for me?"

"Stay, my child—we will talk of that presently. Papa must rest now."

All this while a rather ungainly-looking youth who had followed the gentleman into the room, stood near the door, with his hat in his hand, turning it round and round nervously. The lady suddenly perceived him.

"Oh! Godfrey, have you engaged a young man in Matthew's place? But, dear me! he'll never do—what an awkward fellow!"

"Hush, Belle," replied her husband, a little sharply, "you are making a great mistake." Then turning round, he took the hand of the youth, and led him forward. "This is a relation of mine, Clarence Hope—the son of my poor cousin. He is come to stay with us for a time. Will you give orders for the blue room to be prepared for him?"

The lady stared with an expression of blank amazement.

"Your relation? Oh! indeed. I'm delighted I'm sure—but really I did not expect the—the blue room?—you can't mean that, you know my nieces will arrive in a few days, Thyrsa and Henrietta Carlton. But the housekeeper must see to the arrangements—I really cannot fatigue myself."

"Well, well, the housekeeper must prepare a comfortable room; and in the meantime let us have some dinner."

The appearance of the strange youth was certainly not calculated to produce a favourable impression, especially on a person who judged so much by the eye, and possessed so keen

a sense of the beautiful as Lady Hope. He was tall and lank, and his hair hung in straight masses on each side of his face and over his forehead as if it defied any attempt at a parting. His manner was shy and nervous, and he seemed to be under a continual difficulty in disposing of his arms and legs. He was dressed in a new suit of black, in which he evidently felt ill at ease, and appeared to be about seventeen years of age.

During the meal the lady, though outwardly civil, continued to regard her guest with looks of disapprobation, and her husband's manner displayed a certain degree of embarrassment, probably produced by the knowledge that the visitor he had brought with him was by no means a welcome addition to the family party.

Later in the evening, when Lionel had been with some difficulty coaxed off to bed with a promise of several new toys in the morning, and a present, *pro tem.*, of a box of sweet-meats, and the strange youth had by Sir Godfrey's advice retired to rest after the fatigues of his journey, Lady Hope began to express her dissatisfaction openly.

"My dear Godfrey, did you ever see such a strange frightful looking creature! How could you think of bringing him here? In the state of my health, it was really extremely inconsiderate."

Sir Godfrey's face assumed a grave and rather angry expression.

"Bella, when I went away, you know I told you I was summoned to the north of Ireland to attend the death-bed of an old friend, Daniel Hope, distantly related to my father's family. His death occurred a few hours after my arrival, and I find he has left this boy wholly unprotected and unprovided for. The child has not latterly resided with his father, but was placed at a school in England immediately after the death of his mother, which occurred twelve years ago. He is too old, however, to remain there longer. I have formerly received great kindness from poor Daniel, and I promised him on his death-bed to be a friend to his son. If you wish to oblige me, you will also be kind to him."

"Oh, of course I shall be civil so long as he remains here. I hope I always act like a lady. But I think you might have consulted me before bringing home such a very objectionable visitor."

Sir Godfrey Hope was the possessor of an ample fortune and a large estate, situated in the midst of the most magnificent forest scenery. The property was entailed, a great portion of the house very ancient, and the family had for years occupied an important position in the county. In his youth Sir Godfrey had been rather wild and extravagant, and the cause of much trouble and anxiety to old Sir Lionel, his father; but rather late in life, after the estate had come into his possession, he had

married a young lady of good connections, but no fortune, by whom he was the father of one son, the beautiful boy Lionel. An only child, the heir to a fortune and estate, handsome and clever, the pride and darling of his father, and idolized by his mother, to whom his wishes were laws, except when they chanced to interfere with her own selfish gratification; little Lionel seemed to be exempt from trouble and misfortune.

Nearly three weeks had elapsed since the return of Sir Godfrey, when the following conversation took place between him and his wife:—

"My dear Godfrey, did you specify any time for this young man's visit? He has already been here more than a fortnight, and that is quite long enough I am sure. You will have done all that is necessary to shew respect to your cousin's memory. Shall I give him a hint to take his departure?"

"Indeed, my dear, you must do nothing of the kind."

"What do you mean, Sir Godfrey? You know I am expecting Thyrsa and Henrietta Carlton, and it is extremely inconvenient—"

"I thought you understood my wishes and intentions," said Sir Godfrey, not without some hesitation, while an angry flush mounted to his forehead, "if you do not, it is better you should be at once aware that I mean to act as a guardian and protector to this boy—in fact, to adopt him into my family. He will reside here for the present."

"Reside! Are you mad, Sir Godfrey? The idea is preposterous. The son of a distant cousin—and, I think you told me, wholly unprovided for?"

"The more need that some one should be found to befriend and maintain him."

"And you choose that office? You are willing to burden yourself with the support of a person, almost a stranger, and to subject me to the annoyance of having such a *bête noire* continually in the house, to be the laughing-stock of visitors, and a frightful example to my darling boy as he grows older. It is really too bad!"

Lady Hope had recourse, as usual, to her *vinaigrette*, and there seemed some danger of a fainting fit; but though tears, entreaties, and threats were alternately made use of by the lady, her husband remained fixed in his resolution, only relenting so far as to promise that Clarence should only remain at the Hall until Sir Godfrey could make some arrangement for placing him out in the world, and with this assurance Lady Hope was compelled to be satisfied. But years rolled away, and the obnoxious inmate still remained a resident in the family. It is true some change for the better had taken place in his manner and appearance, for when Lady Hope ascertained that she must submit to be annoyed with his society, she took great pains for

her own sake that he should be made to appear as presentable as possible. When the long black locks had been cut and arranged, so far as their stubborn nature would admit, and his low broad forehead and dark eyes were more exposed to view, his features were by no means unpleasing ; and a drill-sergeant performed a wonderful alteration in his gait and figure though a certain awkwardness in his appearance, and manner of moving still remained. Nervous and shy, he continued to be to a painful extent ; and these feelings were probably increased by the haughty manner with which Lady Hope continually kept him in awe, and the impertinence and disrespect of little Lionel, who had been early taught to despise and ridicule him. By Sir Godfrey he was treated with more consideration and kindness, and he would sometimes resent any insult or injury offered to his adopted son ; but he found little pleasure in the society of the shy youth, and perhaps was influenced in some degree by the feelings of his wife towards him, for he usually contented himself with seeing that he was not grossly neglected, without troubling himself much in matters where the young man's feelings were concerned. The subject of removing Clarence from home and placing him in some profession had frequently been discussed, but the nervous peculiarities of the poor youth seemed to render him unfit to be sent out into the world. Though he was not deficient in mental capacity, and had a great love for books, his strange nervous temperament made him shrink from the companionship of other young men, and there was an oddity about him which rendered him continually subject to ridicule. However anxious Lady Hope might have been to get rid of him, even she was forced to confess that there was no situation for which the poor fellow was capable. Thus matters had gone on, and nothing had been done to further the desired end, by the time Clarence had reached his twenty-second year. To one person only had he ever spoken of his early remembrances—Cecilia, or as she was always called, Cecil Conyers, of whom we shall presently speak. Her sweet, gentle manner had won his affection and confidence, and she had drawn from him the history of his childhood, so far as he retained any recollection of it. He had lived with his mother in a little village in Ireland, in some very remote district, he fancied, and his father came to see him sometimes, but not very often. He remembered his mother well ; of his other parent he had a very slight recollection. Then came a sad time of illness and death, and he was dressed in a black frock, and taken away to England. He disliked to dwell upon the incidents of his school life. He had been very unhappy, for the masters were severe on what they considered his stupidity, and by many of the boys he had been made a perfect butt. Little Cecil listened, and pitied, and took a great interest in the unfortunate young man.

The Misses Carlton were frequent visitors at the Hall. They were fashionable, common-place girls, lively and accomplished, pretty enough to excite some admiration in others, and a considerable amount of vanity in themselves. They professed the most enthusiastic admiration for their little cousin, on whom they bestowed every flattering and endearing title, and who had been portrayed by their pencils, first as Cupid, in the days of his long curls and pinafores, then as an Apollo, and afterwards in his own person, mounted on his pretty Shetland pony, with old dog Nip by his side. On a bright sunny afternoon in July, Thyrza and Henrietta Carlton sat under one of the shady lime-trees on the lawn sketching the view of the distant village, with the church spire rising up among the trees.

"Where is Lionel?" said Henrietta, "I want to take him into my sketch. He would look very well in the foreground, seated on that knoll, with Nip at his feet."

"Oh, he is gone over to Cinderbrook with Clarence," replied Thyrza, "and Aunt Bella does not expect them home to dinner. I wonder she trusts the dear child with that great awkward fellow. What a strange infatuation it is in Sir Godfrey to keep that young man here!"

"Yes, it is an odd fancy," said her sister; "but I think Lionel may be safely trusted with Clarence. He takes extraordinary care of him, and he is not such a bad fellow after all."

"Oh!" answered Thyrza, with a slight sneer, "I suppose we shall hear next that he has been paying you particular attention."

"Well, I must say he is always extremely civil. Only think of his having the politeness to walk all the way to Ravensborough for my drawing-paper, although by mistake he brought me a quire of foolscap! I really fancy the poor fellow is a little bit smitten."

"Such a conquest would be something to be proud of certainly!" said Thyrza, laughing, "I should feel quite envious, only, my dear, I am afraid you flatter yourself too much, and that little Cecil Conyers has by far the larger share of Clarence's admiration."

"Pshaw! a mere child—younger than Lionel. Really, when you talk in such an absurd way one would think you were jealous. You know if foolish boys will take fancies, and make themselves miserable, one can't always help it. I'm sure I feel more sorry than proud. But have you heard whether Mr. and Mrs. Conyers are coming to-night, and if the Captain is likely to be with them?"

"Yes, I heard Aunt Bella say she had had a note from Mrs. Conyers, and that her son arrived last night. I wonder if he is really so very handsome!"

"He has dark hair and moustaches, my aunt says, and, therefore, probably prefers a blonde complexion in a lady."

"Very likely ; but, my dear, my hair is, I think, only a few shades darker than yours."

"I wonder, then, that you appropriate to yourself those foolish lines of young Montague's alluding to the fair one with raven locks !"

"Nonsense ! I never said they were addressed to me. Besides, there is such a thing as poet's licence."

"We ought to be thinking about our dress. I shall wear my pink barége, as it will only be a quiet party."

"Oh ! white—by all means, white—plain white muslin. It looks so much more simple and girlish, and we had better be dressed alike. I hope dear Lionel will be back in good time to entertain Cecil Conyers."



## CHAPTER II.

### THE OLD KING WILLIAM.

Mr. Conyers was the owner of Monkswood, a spacious and venerable mansion, only four miles distant from Beech Hall. He was one of the verderers of the forest, and possessed of considerable influence and popularity, like Sir Godfrey, with whom he maintained a strict friendship, although they differed in politics, Mr. Conyers being a staunch Conservative, while his neighbour strongly advocated the Whig policy. On this subject they could agree to differ, for Mr. Conyers could always maintain his own principles with coolness and patience, and Sir Godfrey, though of an irascible temper, readily forgot any offensive expression which might occur during the heat of an argument. In their tastes they suited each other exactly, both being addicted to the sports of the field, and all kinds of country amusements. Mr. Conyers had a family of four children ; his eldest son, the heir to the estate, was, at the time of which we are writing, travelling abroad ; the second, a captain in a cavalry regiment, just returned home on leave ; a daughter married to a neighbouring clergyman ; and little Cecil, whose name we have mentioned already. Mrs. Conyers was a great contrast to Lady Hope in habits and disposition. Both her head and her hands appeared to be continually actively employed. She busied herself very much in parish matters, a little too much, perhaps, sometimes ; was a great promoter of schools and all public charities ; and though condemned sometimes as interfering and officious, was still a decidedly useful person in her own immediate neighbourhood.

The pretty drawing-room at Beech Hall looked charmingly cool and comfortable on that warm summer evening ; with its French windows opening out upon the smooth lawn. It was a modern room, added to the original building by Sir Godfrey himself, and furnished with every regard to taste and elegance under the auspices of his wife soon after their marriage. The Misses Carlton, both dressed in white, were at the piano ; Thyrsa accompanying her sister, who was singing with considerable effect and some affectation a beautiful air from an opera, while her eyes were occasionally turned softly and expressively towards Captain Conyers, who, bending over the fair pianist in a manner intended to be peculiarly graceful, had

undertaken the office of turning over the leaves of her music-book, frequently doing so at the wrong place, thereby causing a pause in the song, and an arch smile from the lady. Sir Godfrey and Mr. Conyers had entered into a discussion concerning some recent alteration in the game laws, in which both gentlemen appeared equally interested. Lady Hope, as was her custom, reclined on the sofa, and, though the evening was sultry, wore a mantle of pink cashmere trimmed with swan's-down, for the delicate state of her health, real or imaginary, was always pleaded as an excuse for invalid habits. Mrs. Conyers, seated near her, engaged in a piece of fancy knitting, was endeavouring to awaken her sympathy in behalf of a young person for whom she was anxious to obtain a situation as housemaid. Little Cecil sat on an ottoman near the window, trying to amuse herself with a book of engravings, and listening to the confused conversation going on around her.

"My dear Conyers, I tell you if we cannot get old Forbes to preserve the Lea woods, we shall soon not have a pheasant left on the estate."

"One of the quickest girls we have in the school, I assure you; and the poor thing has a wretched home, for——"

"May I venture to cry *encore*, Miss Carlton; or will you favour us with——"

"Oh, yes; I always like to have a bit of work to take up. This is for the bazaar for the benefit of the Infirmary; but about Sarah Wood——"

"Why, as to hares, I am convinced that under the new law——"

"You don't know Italian? What a pity! *Si si l'amo*—that means——"

The explanation was never given, for a sudden pause occurred in the conversation of each separate party. The attention of all was attracted by a loud scream uttered by Lady Hope, who had fallen back on the sofa in a fit of violent hysterics.

"What on earth is the matter now?" exclaimed Sir Godfrey, giving vent to his annoyance in stronger terms than he was in the habit of using in the presence of ladies, for he felt angry rather than alarmed, being accustomed to similar displays on his wife's part, often for a trivial cause. A servant stood by the sofa, looking greatly disconcerted.

"If you please, sir—" he began. Mrs. Conyers interrupted him.

"I fear," she replied, "some little accident has occurred to Lionel, and James has explained the matter to his mistress rather too abruptly. You should have been more cautious, James."

"An accident to Lionel? What do you mean?"

"Why, Sir," replied James, nervously, "I'm sorry I—I

alarmed my lady, but Master Lionel has been and fallen down Old King William, and I thought I had better mention it."

"Fallen down where?" exclaimed the Captain and the two young ladies all at once, in voices perfectly natural. But no further explanation was required by Sir Godfrey. The pit bearing the name of King William was a coal mine, which for some years had ceased to be worked. There were many such in the forest; some of them very inefficiently protected. The mouth of the pit in question had been partly boarded over, but the planks were rotten and old. Nothing could exceed the dismay caused by this intelligence among the lately cheerful party. The message had been brought by one of the pit boys, who had been despatched by Clarence, he himself having remained on the spot.

"What a pity the child should have been trusted with him. It must be all owing to Clarence's awkwardness," exclaimed Thyrza Carlton.

"Oh, don't say that," said Henrietta, "Clarence might not have been in fault, perhaps. You know, dear, Lionel is sometimes a little wayward."

"Silence, girls," cried Sir Godfrey, angrily; "your nonsensical chattering will do no good—go and attend to your aunt; and you, Captain Conyers, will come with me, will you not?"

"Yes, of course, my son and I will both go with you," said Mr. Conyers. "The more the better. Call my man and all your own servants, and tell them to bring some strong ropes and a lantern. Is there anything else that may be needed?"

Lady Hope required no assistance from her nieces who had come forward to offer their services, abashed by Sir Godfrey's rebuke. She was fast recovering her senses under the care of the energetic and active Mrs. Conyers, who had lost no time in seeking and applying remedies, such as the case required. Lady Hope was now calling out wildly for Lionel, her darling, her only child! Little Cecil knelt by her side, burying her face in the sofa cushions, and sobbing as if her heart would break.

When the gentlemen and their attendants arrived at the mouth of the Old King William Pit, they found poor Clarence seated on its brink, his head resting on his knees, the image of mute despair.

"How did this happen, sir?" said Sir Godfrey, in a voice of thunder.

Clarence looked up, with an expression of hopeless grief, mingled with terror, and was beginning to falter out some explanation, when Mr. Conyers interfered in a calm, firm tone.

"Don't wait to explain now—we must act, not talk;" and he began to give rapid orders to those about him.

"Fasten the rope to that tall post. Stay—let us see if it is

securely fixed in the ground. There, that seems all firm. Now, one of you must be lowered into the pit with the lighted lantern. Who will go? Willis, you are too stout—the rope will scarcely hold you. James—why, you're not going to turn coward, I hope, when your little master is in danger?"

"In danger! Lord-a-mercy, sir! if he've a fallen down that there hole, he'll never come up alive—and it would be the death of any man——"

"You are a cowardly set, all of you," cried Sir Godfrey. "I will go myself. If my boy is dead, what matter if I——"

Clarence had started up, and seizing the arm of Mr. Conyers convulsively, his dark eyes flashing with a wild light, he exclaimed—

"Let me go, sir! I am light and active; and no one will miss me if I never come back."

"Let you go? Well, if you are willing it seems the best plan, for you are the lightest of the party."

"My poor boy!" said Sir Godfrey. "Oh, no, he must not——"

"A moment's delay may be fatal," said Mr. Conyers.

During this conversation the Captain had once or twice come forward, and commenced a hesitating speech, in which he stopped abruptly, and appeared to be regarding the immaculate state of his dress boots and trowsers.

"Clarence must go," said Mr. Conyers, again.

"If there is no other means to save my boy," replied Sir Godfrey, and he sank on his knees by the side of the pit, praying with an earnestness which till then perhaps he had never felt for his child's preservation, and that of the brave youth who was about to place himself in a situation of danger for his sake.

In a few moments the rope had been secured round the waist of Clarence, and with the lantern in his hand, he was carefully lowered into the pit. Shortly afterwards a loud shout, the signal agreed upon, announced to those above the desire of Clarence to be drawn up. It was evident that the weight at the end of the rope was nearly doubled, and with renewed hope the men exerted their strength, assisted by two miners who had come to the spot alarmed by the report of the boy, Clarence's messenger. In a few minutes Clarence appeared at the pit's mouth, bearing the body of his cousin, dead or insensible, and disfigured with red clay. When he had been conveyed to the hall and medical assistance procured, it was discovered that he had been stunned by the fall, and that one of his arms was dislocated. He had, however, sustained no mortal injury, his fall having been broken by a beam across the pit, on which a good deal of rubbish had collected. When discovered by Clarence he was resting on a heap of stones and earth, his head inclined over the beam in such a position that the slightest movement or

displacement of the rubbish by which he was supported might have precipitated him to the bottom, so that he owed his preservation to his perfectly insensible state. It was with difficulty that Clarence, having been forced to let go his lantern, succeeded in lifting him carefully into his arms, and guarding him from additional injury from striking against the sides of the pit during their ascent. According to the account afterwards given by Clarence, the accident happened thus:—They had paid a visit that morning to Mrs. Middleton, the sister of Cecil Conyers, and wife of the vicar of Cinderbrook, and remained there till late in the afternoon; but had declined the invitation to dinner, because Lionel was anxious to return in time for the party in the evening, when he knew his friend and favourite companion, Cecil Conyers, was expected with her parents. To save time, they had taken the short cut through the forest. On arriving near the King William Pit, Lionel, with a boy's natural love for danger and mischief, had gone considerably out of the path in order to look into it, and persisted in running up and down the plank which crossed the centre of the orifice. Clarence had followed, and requested him earnestly to desist, representing the extreme danger of what he was doing; but the more he entreated and insisted, the more was the boy determined to persist, and when his cousin made an attempt to seize his arm in order to lead him away, he uttered a loud laugh, and, jumping violently on the rotten plank, it broke under his feet, and with a scream of agony he disappeared from the sight of his horror-struck companion. Although Clarence did not appear to have been in fault with respect to the accident, and in spite of his intrepid conduct in risking his life for Lionel's rescue, he did not escape some blame for leading his cousin into a situation of so much danger, and many warnings to act more carefully in future.

Sir Godfrey at the same time expressed himself much pleased with the courageous manner in which he had acted, Henrietta Carlton congratulated him with one of her beautiful smiles, and Lady Hope carried her gratitude so far as to thank him in a set speech, and to present him with a gold locket, containing her own hair and that of her darling Lionel.

## CHAPTER III.

### TIME'S CHANGES.

Ten years have passed—a short period for the old to look back upon, an immense interval to the young—ten years which have wrought many great and sudden changes, and many more gradual but as complete. The wayward, spirited boy of twelve has become a fine, handsome young man, extravagant and reckless, with a very good opinion of his own merits and abilities, and a very strong inclination to be guided by his own will. The shy, awkward youth has reached the age of manhood, and has begun to assume an old and haggard look, for his masses of black hair are already tinged with grey, and his face, always pale and thin, has become paler and thinner; yet he is shy and awkward still. A greater change, perhaps, had taken place in Cecil Conyers. As a child, she had been pretty and interesting, remarkable for her gentle and winning manner, which to poor Clarence, especially, possessed such an inexpressible charm. At twenty years of age she was not, perhaps, strictly handsome—her features might not have borne a minute scrutiny; nor was there any extraordinary charm in her outward appearance to dazzle the beholder at first sight. She was nothing more than a gentle, sweet-tempered simple-looking girl, with smooth glossy hair, and a fresh blooming complexion, such as we may chance to meet with any day, but whose beauty in its full extent we may fail to discover, till a long period of intercourse has made us thoroughly acquainted with the soul within, and we confess with a modern poet—

She is not fair to outward view,  
As many maidens be;  
Her loveliness I never knew  
Until she smiled on me;  
Oh, then I learnt her eyes were bright—  
A well of love a spring of light.

But Cecil's beauty, both of person and disposition, was appreciated in the highest degree by Clarence Hope. Having known her from her childhood, he had had every opportunity of judging of her true character; and, as we have said before, he had from the first been won by the sympathy she expressed in the sorrows of his early life. While he had been continually the object of scorn and ridicule to others, Cecil had always treated

him with tenderness and respect ; when he had been unjustly accused, she had warmly and constantly taken his part ; and in matters of taste and judgment she would often appeal to his opinion, as if on purpose to prove that she at least did not wholly ignore and dispise him. It is not wonderful, then, if poor Clarence formed for her an attachment as passionate as it was sincere. For a long time the idea of placing his young relation out in the world had been given up by Sir Godfrey. The matter had been delayed so long, on account of the many obstacles which continually presented themselves, that at last it became quite a dead-letter ; and even Lady Hope had ceased to be urgent on the subject.

Lionel had from a child expressed an eager desire to enter the army, and in due time his wishes were complied with ; in fact, when Lionel had determined on any scheme, he was pretty sure to have his own way. It was a trial to Lady Hope to part with her darling, of course. In his boyhood, her consent had been with difficulty obtained for his being sent to finish his education at Eton, as he had remained at home under a private tutor till he was fourteen years of age. Only the persuasion that a public school would tend to render her boy manly and gentlemanlike had won from her a reluctant consent.

The idea of the army, however, was agreeable to her in some respects. It was the only profession that would at all suit Lionel ; and though as the heir to a good fortune and estate there was no necessity for his entering any profession, Sir Godfrey had assured her that some occupation was desirable for every young man on first starting in life. He himself had held a commission in a cavalry regiment for some years previous to his father's death. Lady Hope felt now indeed prouder than ever of her son. If Lionel looked handsome and stylish in the plain dress of a country gentleman, how much more so did he appear arrayed in the showy uniform of the dashing — Regiment of Light Dragoons ? Time had wrought little change in Lady Hope herself, except that she was a little more sallow, and a great deal more indolent, and talked more pathetically than ever of her headaches and spasms, and many nervous affections, one might have almost supposed her to have spent the last ten years of her life in a perfectly quiescent state, wrapped in her Indian shawl on the sofa in her dining-room, where she was first introduced to the reader. But Sir Godfrey was an old man now, if not in years, in feeling and appearance, and had been forced reluctantly to relinquish many of the active pursuits in which he most delighted. He suffered from a heart complaint, and the doctors had said that in case of any over-exertion it might at any moment terminate fatally. Lionel was home on leave at the time on which our story recommences, having gone through his first experiences of a military career at Brighton, where his

regiment was stationed, and where he had been courted and flattered by his brother officers, and many of the fair and gay of the opposite sex, as a young man of handsome person, fashionable manners, and brilliant prospects, and had been led into more than one extravagant folly which he was anxious to conceal from his father's knowledge. The Misses Carlton were also on a visit to the Hall, for, strange to say, they were both still unmarried. The bloom of youth had departed from their pretty faces, and they were forced to have occasional recourse to art to enhance their natural attractions. They had enjoyed their season as belles, and been compelled unwillingly to give up their places to others. They had danced and flirted, and sung beautiful Italian airs, and sweet English ballads; their drawings in water-colours and crayons had been applauded and admired in countless drawing-rooms; and they had seen many a plain, quiet girl draw a valuable ticket in the matrimonial lottery; yet they remained only Thyrsa and Henrietta Carlton still. Captain, now Major, Conyers, was with his regiment in India, and had married a young lady of rank and fortune there, and many other seeming admirers had married and settled in life also. Thyrsa was a little soured in temper and manner by her numerous disappointments, but Henrietta still retained her grace and sprightliness, and condescended even to lavish her smiles and pretty attentions on Clarence, for, as she said to her sister in confidence, Sir Godfrey would provide handsomely for him some day. But Clarence had more sense and discrimination than people gave him credit for, besides he had no eyes for any one but Cecil Conyers. It may be he never dreamed of the possibility of her returning his attachment; to obtain the treasure of her love was a happiness to which he could scarcely venture to aspire; yet, however humble he might be, however conscious of his own deficiencies, probably in some secret corner of his heart, unknown even to himself, a tender seed of hope had been sown and nourished. For it is so with us all; we declare and believe some wished-for blessing to be unattainable, but when we discover it to be utterly beyond our grasp the disappointment is scarcely less great. If poor Clarence had ever thus deceived himself with a false hope, the time of awakening from his dream was come now. One evening he had wandered out into the shrubbery with a favourite book in his hand, for the weather was warm, and he preferred reading under the shade of the trees, to remaining in the drawing-room, where the Misses Carlton were discussing some new fashions in a book they had just had sent from town; and Lady Hope was entertaining Mrs. Middleton with a long account of a fearful attack she had had during the night, and the head-ache from which she was suffering in consequence. Mrs. Middleton with some of her children and Cecil Conyers were spending the day



at the hall, but Cecil had wandered away with Lionel, Clarence knew not whither. He continued to walk slowly on, reading as he went, towards his favourite seat in a distant part of the shrubbery; but, on arriving there, found it already occupied. The sound of two voices first caught his attention, and caused him to raise his eyes from his book, when he perceived Lionel and Cecil seated close together, his arm encircling her waist and her head resting on his shoulder. The state of the case was at once apparent to poor Clarence. Cecil loved Lionel—if she did not he felt sure she would not allow him to treat her with such familiarity—they loved and were engaged to each other. Clarence stood rooted to the spot, for it seemed impossible for him either to advance or to turn back, but some slight movement attracted the attention of Lionel, and looking suddenly round he became aware of the presence of his cousin. Then he withdrew his arm from Cecil, and she started to her feet. A crimson flush spread itself over her face as she looked for an instant at Clarence, and then down on the ground. Lionel appeared quite at his ease, while Clarence was nervous and agitated. He came towards them then, and said in a faltering voice—

“I beg your pardon, I did not know—”

“Why do you stand there like a fool? You might have had the sense to turn back,” said Lionel, abruptly—he never used very measured terms in speaking to his cousin.

“Hush, Lionel!” said Cecil, in a pained and almost angry tone; “I cannot bear to hear you speak so. Dear Clarence has done no harm, and we have no reason to be ashamed, have we?”

Even while she spoke her frightened, nervous look belied her assertion. It seemed to Clarence that his best course then was to leave them to themselves, and turning suddenly, he actually commenced a rapid retreat, which he performed in so strange and awkward a manner as to call forth a loud burst of laughter from Lionel, which rang in his ears as he hastened through the shrubbery, and he did not hear the gentle remonstrance uttered by Cecil.

Not long after this discovery so fatal to Clarence's peace of mind, Sir Godfrey one morning called to his son to follow him as he quitted the breakfast-room, and leading the way to the library, threw himself down on an easy chair, with a violence which added to his flushed and angry brow betokened his temper to have been ruffled. Lionel had some misgivings lest among the numerous despatches which the baronet had lately taken from the post-bag there might have been a letter making his father acquainted with some of his own debts and misdemeanors. He chose to assume an air of indifference, and taking up a newspaper which lay on the table began to glance

at its contents, as if he supposed Sir Godfrey had nothing of any importance to speak about.

"Listen to me, sir!" said the old man, angrily, "I have borne with a great deal of your wayward folly, but, upon my word, you are carrying it too far."

Lionel laid down the paper, with a look of surprise.

"Why, what have I been doing now? Really, sir, I don't know to what you allude."

"I allude to your disrespectful manner towards Clarence," replied his father; "this morning at the breakfast table, you made use of expressions of which you ought to be ashamed."

Lionel smiled contemptuously.

"I certainly quizzed the fellow's awkwardness in letting the coffee fall on Thyrza Carlton's dress, and his extraordinary manner of apologising—I think I called him a stupid fool, that was all."

"And was that an expression becoming an officer and a gentleman?" said Sir Godfrey, "to say nothing of its being unchristian and unkind."

It was now Lionel's turn to flush and look angry.

"Indeed, Sir," he began, but his father interrupted him.

"It is not of that one expression I have to complain," he said, "but of your whole conduct to Clarence; it is disrespectful and unkind. When you were a boy it was excusable, but now—"

"I was not really aware," said the young man sarcastically, "that my cousin was entitled to so great a degree of respect. In future I shall treat him with all deference."

"Ah, Lionel, my boy," said the baronet, in a sad and softened tone, "you take my words in ill part and are not aware that it is for your own sake that I speak them. I have loved you more than ever I loved any earthly thing, and have sacrificed duty, I fear, on account of the pride I had in you, and my conscience has been continually reproaching me with having done wrong; after all this I fear you will prove ungrateful."

"Father," said Lionel, a little more humbly, "I never doubted your love for me, nor am I ungrateful, I hope, for any sacrifice you may have made on my account—but I don't see how my conduct towards Clarence is concerned with all this."

"It has much to do with it," said Sir Godfrey, earnestly; "only try to realize the hopes I have formed concerning you—to keep up the honour of the family, and study to become a true gentleman, and a worthy man, and you will I trust for many years enjoy the estate and fortune after my death, and hold the same honourable position in the county your ancestors have held: but beware of offending Clarence Hope, or of displeasing me by treating him with contumely."

The old man had risen from his seat, and seized his son's hand, and he spoke with so much earnestness, that Lionel

for once felt abashed, and almost subdued, and said, as they quitted the library,

"Dear father, you need not be afraid ; I will try to treat Clarence with more consideration in future."

Only a few days after the above conversation had taken place between the baronet and his son, there was sad confusion and sorrow among the inmates of Beech Hall. Death had come suddenly and summoned away the husband and father without a moment allowed for preparation. Sir Godfrey had been present at a county meeting at the neighbouring town of Ravensborough, and had made a speech of some length, in which he had displayed a considerable degree of excitement. He had afterwards attended a public dinner, and ridden rather rapidly home on account of a thunder-storm which appeared to be impending. The effect that had been dreaded from any unusual fatigue and excitement had followed—at night as he was ascending the staircase, in order to retire to his room, he fell insensible ; nor did he ever recover consciousness. On the following morning the blinds were closely drawn over all the windows at Beech Hall, and Lady Hope had been taken from the chamber which she had occupied for more than twenty years, leaving it worse than tenantless. Lionel felt the shock of his father's death bitterly and deeply. He had received from him such unvarying love and kindness during the whole of his life, and he was conscious that he had not always repaid that tenderness in the manner it deserved. The grief of poor Clarence was scarcely less violent ; for though Sir Godfrey had never been very affectionate in his manner to him, and had even at times treated him with harshness, he still felt grateful for the generosity which had befriended his boyhood, and had been continued during so many years, and was accustomed to regard Sir Godfrey as his best friend, with the exception of Cecil Conyers.

## CHAPTER IV.

### CONCLUSION.

Some time had elapsed after the funeral, and a sad group had assembled in the dining-room. Lady Hope lay upon the sofa in her widow's dress, looking scarcely more pale and languid than usual. Lionel sat at the table, looking over some letters and papers in a vexed impatient way, as if the employment were wearisome and disagreeable to him; while Clarence was assisting him to the best of his power, by sorting and arranging the letters for his perusal. On a low seat near the sofa where Lady Hope was reclining sat Cecil Conyers, endeavouring to interest and amuse that lady, which she found she could best do by listening patiently to the many fretful complaints in which the invalid was so fond of indulging. Mrs. Conyers had hastened to the hall immediately on receiving the news of Sir Godfrey's death, to offer her condolence and services, and she had remained there ever since; for, though her coming had been attributed at first by Lady Hope to impertinent curiosity, she soon succeeded in making herself so useful that she was earnestly entreated to remain. Care and business of many kinds had already begun to fall upon Lionel as owner of the property, and he was beginning to see the importance of his new situation. A will had been found executed some years before by Sir Godfrey, in which he bequeathed some small legacies to servants, and distant relations, and five thousand pounds to Clarence Hope. The rest of his personal property was left to his wife, who was also well provided for by her marriage settlement.

Lionel was still occupied in examining the papers, when Mrs. Conyers suddenly entered the room, with a small basket of keys and several account books in her hand.

"I have settled everything with the housekeeper, dear Lady Hope," she said, in a tone of importance; "though, to tell the truth, she seemed rather to resent my interference; so you need not trouble yourself the least in the world about it. I have been looking over the contents of the store-closets with her, and have made inventories of everything; and to-morrow, if you will allow me, I will examine the state of the table linen."

"Oh, thank you, thank you. I really must leave it all to you. My nerves have been so very much shaken, and I never had a head for these things. You and Mrs. Webster can manage it all very well, I dare say. It is so kind of you."

"Oh, I am sure I am only too happy to be of use. And,

my dear Lionel, if you will allow me, I should like to give you a few hints with regard to the establishment. I don't quite like that butler of yours—Hunter I think you call him. The cellar—”

“Another time, Mrs. Conyers, if you please,” said Lionel, rising abruptly, “I really cannot attend to things of that sort yet.”

Then, addressing Clarence, he added—“Will you tie these up, and put them away for me? I must go out now.”

“Oh, yes,” said Clarence, in his usual obliging way, “I will tie them up in packets, and put them in the drawer of the bureau in the library. Did you leave the key?”

“No, no, not in the bureau,” and Lionel hastily took out a bunch of keys in order to ascertain if that belonging to the bureau were still in his possession.

“Where then?” said Clarence, humbly.

“On the library table—anywhere!” said Lionel in an impatient tone. As he was leaving the room Cecil partly rose, and looked after him anxiously. She saw that something had happened to disturb him, and thought he might perhaps wish that she should accompany him in a walk in the garden or in the shrubbery, but as he expressed no such desire, and did not even once look towards her, she reseated herself, and bent over her work to conceal the tears with which her eyes were overflowing. That Lionel should feel anxious and depressed, as he evidently did, and not seek for sympathy and consolation from her, pained her gentle, loving nature. Lionel walked slowly towards the shrubbery, scarcely conscious which direction he was taking, and wandered on till he reached the retired seat where Clarence had lately seen him with Cecil. Then he paced up and down the gravelled path for more than an hour. During this time a terrible conflict was going on in the young man's mind—a struggle between his dearest hopes, wishes, and interests, and every principle of honour and duty. In searching that morning among his father's private papers he had made a discovery affecting in a very serious degree his future prospects in life. As yet the secret was known to him only, and it had evidently been the intention of Sir Godfrey that it should be for ever concealed. Was he bound to speak the word which must mar all his brilliant prospects, and remove from him the hope of winning Cecil Conyers for a long time, perhaps for ever. Must he give up all the proud hopes in which he had been nurtured,—renounce fortune, title, and power, and the possession of the girl he loved,—or should he let matters rest as they were, as Sir Godfrey had intended they should remain, and at once destroy the proofs which could alone condemn him? His mother too! How would she bear the sudden shock?—would not such a blow crush her to the earth. She would never be

able to bear it. The perplexed state of the young man's feelings had become unendurable. He threw himself down on the ground under the trees, and resting his head on the cool grass, groaned aloud.

Dinner was over, and the ladies had retired to the drawing room. Lionel and Clarence were left alone, for they were the only gentlemen in the house now. Lionel had become calm and collected in his manner, but he had been very silent during dinner and was deadly pale.

"Clarence," he said suddenly, "you don't care for wine, I know—I want to talk to you on business—can you attend now? or perhaps we had better go together to the library."

"Anything you please, dear Lionel," said Clarence; "I just wanted to finish this slice of melon, and take another biscuit; but if you are in a hurry I don't mind a bit."

"Well—I'd rather say what I have to say and have done with it," answered Lionel. "It's not such a pleasant subject to talk about—to me at least; but if one must take a bitter dose, it's best to swallow it at once," and he made an attempt to smile.

Clarence expected to have some unpleasant business thrust upon him, but he was quite prepared to undertake it for Lionel's sake, so he followed him submissively to the library.

Lionel immediately went to the bureau, and taking out a bundle of papers, said, "Here, read these. My poor father probably intended to destroy them before he died, but he neglected to do so. Read them, I say!"

He had thrown himself in Sir Godfrey's easy chair, and Clarence, with a bewildered look, sat at the table and began to unfold the papers and read them carefully. He seemed to have some difficulty in doing so.

At last Lionel said, impatiently, "Well, have you read them?"

"I have read nearly all," said Clarence, timidly; "but I don't quite understand. You know I am sometimes dull, Lionel."

"You don't understand? You are duller of comprehension, then, even than I imagined. You don't see that you are my father's eldest son—his heir—and that I am a beggar!"

"Oh, Lionel, that can't be true," said Clarence, looking painfully perplexed; "you know I am the son of Daniel Hope, Sir Godfrey's cousin."

"Pshaw! only a hoax on my poor father's part to account for his adopting you, and to deceive my mother. Daniel Hope himself and the story of the death-bed promise may have been altogether a myth, for anything I know. At all events, you are as much his son as I am."

"The name of Ballicronin seems familiar to me, but who is Nora Maloney?"

"Who is Nora Maloney? Why your mother, to be sure, and my father's wife. I saw the matter only too clearly at once, and will explain it if you cannot read the story as I did in these papers. When my father was with his regiment in the North of Ireland he fell in love with some low Irish girl, this Nora Maloney, and secretly married her. Here is a whole correspondence proving all this, though the woman's letters are difficult to decipher. Then follow letters written after your birth, when your mother was living in a cottage at some out-of-the-way place, called Ballicronin, besides the marriage certificate, and that of your baptism. It is all as clear as daylight. Of course my father was obliged to conceal the affair from my grandfather, and afterwards, when your mother was dead, there seemed no occasion to make the matter known, for, I dare say, he was ashamed of the connection. Then he married my mother, and when I was born it seemed a pity, no doubt, that I should not be the heir, especially as you were such a—I mean as you were not particularly fitted to do credit to the family—ah! my poor father, you know how he idolized me, and what a pride he felt in me from the time I was a baby—well he determined to sacrifice your rights in my favour—that is the long and short of the matter."

"But if he had destroyed these papers?"

"Well, I wonder he never did so; but, no doubt, he intended to burn them before his death, only the event happened so suddenly. Perhaps there may have been some prickings of conscience about the matter, or he may have wished to keep a certain power in his hands on my account. Poor dear old man! He gave me a sort of warning only a few days ago."

"Lionel, have you told anyone else?"

"No, not a soul. You were the proper person to be informed, I thought."

"And what do you intend to do?"

"To do—I? It is for you to act. You are Sir Clarence Hope. But I should say these things had better be shewn to the lawyers."

"Dear Lionel!" said Clarence, suddenly seizing his hand—

"Don't pity me, don't! I should not mind the loss of the fortune and estate so much, I think; but to have to give up Cecil Conyers—that—that—"

Lionel's assumed indifference had forsaken him utterly. He threw himself back on the chair, covered his face with his hands and sobbed like a child. Thus he remained for a few moments, when a sudden blaze of light flashed before his eyes.

He started up.

"What on earth are you doing?"

Clarence had thrown the bundle of papers in the grate, and set fire to them with a match. He stood watching the yellow

flames blazing away, and the particles of burnt paper flying up the chimney. Lionel gazed in silent astonishment.

"My dear brother," said Clarence in a voice tremulous and broken, "let this matter be a secret between us two. I should hate the estate, and the fortune. I am not fit—I could never take them. Let it be as our dear father willed—he has provided for me amply. You and Cecil love each other. To-morrow I shall go away."

"Oh, Clarence, how can I consent to this? But I am so miserably selfish; and indeed it would have been a bitter trial to me to give up all."

"Of course it would; and to me it is no trial at all."

"My dear, generous fellow, you always treated me too well though I deserved so little from you. You saved my life once, and even then I was scarcely grateful. Forgive me, Clarence."

"Forgive you, Lionel?" replied his brother sadly; "it was not your fault. You know she never could have cared for me even if—"

"She? Cecil? I was not speaking of her. I asked you to forgive all past unkindness."

"I never thought you unkind. God bless you, dear Lionel! After all, I feel glad to know you are indeed my own brother."

On the following morning the usual party, with the exception of Clarence, were assembled at the breakfast table.

"It was very strange of Clarence to leave us in this sudden way just when he might have been of some use to Lionel, and rather ungrateful, after all the generous kindness he had received from poor Sir Godfrey," said Lady Hope in a querulous tone.

"I thought," observed Thyrza Carlton, "that he and dear Lionel had had a little quarrel."

"Then Thyrza," said Lionel, sharply, "you thought very wrong."

"Oh!" said Lady Hope, "it is always the way with poor dependents; when they have got all they can, they think no more about one."

"Mother," said Lionel gravely, "I beg you will not speak in that way of Clarence Hope. Perhaps if the most deserving obtained most, he and I might change places."

There was something in her son's manner which convinced Lady Hope that in future she must avoid speaking unkindly of his cousin in his presence, and Cecil expressed her approbation by one of her sweetest smiles, and said in a whisper—

"You are right, Lionel; I am quite sure poor Clarence is not ungrateful."

On the lawn, under the shady lime trees, with branches sweeping the smooth grass, and pale green blossoms giving forth a faint odour in the cool summer evening, sits Lady Hope



—our old friend Cecil. She has lost nothing of her sweet gentle manner, though a certain matronly dignity is added to it, and very little of her early grace and youthful appearance. Lionel is by her side—scarcely the Lionel of former days, for time and circumstances have tended greatly to improve his character. The noble generosity displayed by his elder brother in relinquishing his claims on his account had made a lasting impression on his mind. He had contrasted his own selfishness with the magnanimity of Clarence, and perceived with shame how inferior he was in many respects to his despised brother. Who can say also what change may not have been produced by a woman's tender and softening influence, an influence to which he had never been exposed before ; for the conduct of his weak mother had tended to check rather than encourage every good and generous impulse. But several years had elapsed since the Dowager Lady Hope had been laid by the side of Sir Godfrey, and her son had now only his gentle wife to guide and counsel him—his wife, whom he loved even more tenderly than he had loved his over-indulgent mother. So these two sit together under the lime trees, and the little ones—we forbear to mention how many there are—play about the lawn. Godfrey, the eldest son, has just galloped up on his Shetland pony, the very counterpart of that which his father used to ride, with a grandson of old Nip by his side. He springs from the saddle, and asks his little sister Lily—the girl with the long tresses of golden hair—if she would like to have a ride. But who is that middle-aged, strange-looking man who jumps up from the grass in such a sudden awkward manner, and proceeds clumsily to place the fairy thing upon the saddle ? See how carefully he lifts her up, and puts the reins into the tiny hands, and leads the docile pony ; and with what a proud delighted smile he looks at the lovely child, and watches her every movement. It is poor Cousin Clarence, to whom little Lily is the dearest and loveliest of all earthly things now. After a lapse of some years he had returned to Beech Hall at the earnest request of Sir Lionel, and continued to live in the house where he might have been master, without a feeling of regret for the honours and advantages he had renounced. There was but one blessing he had ever envied Sir Lionel, and time had reconciled him at last even to that disappointment.

Nothing had ever transpired concerning Sir Godfrey's former marriage, for the clergyman who had performed the ceremony and those who had witnessed it had all long been dead. The secret was carefully guarded by the two brothers from all but Cecil, to whom it had been imparted by their mutual wish.

But the shadow is becoming darker under the broad lime-trees, and the dew is beginning to fall on the soft grass. Lady Hope collects her train of merry children, and Cousin Clarence carries little Lily back to Beech Hall.

# A LEGEND OF BOVEY MANOR.

---

## PART I.

The evening of an August day in the year 15— was closing, and the tall oaks and beeches which formed the avenue leading to Bovey Manor had long ceased to cast their broad shadows on the smooth turf, when a young man, about 22 years of age, sprang over the hedge which bounded the coppice, where he had been concealed for some hours, and hastened by a side path towards the residence of his uncle, Sir Stephen Waldron. Passing cautiously round the mansion, he knocked at a small private door, which was immediately opened as to an expected visitor, and he was ushered by a young female attendant into the presence of a fair girl, whose agitated countenance on seeing him expressed at once pleasure and anxiety. A few hurried questions were asked, tender inquiries made for each other's health and safety, then the maid was dismissed, and the cousins—who had been attached from their childhood and were now affianced lovers—sat down to discuss the perilous and painful situation in which they were placed.

"Dear Eleanor," said Cecil, "it was far from my wish to come in this manner, like a culprit, and without my uncle's knowledge ; but your note led me to fear his bitter feelings against me would induce him to refuse me the shelter and concealment I so sorely need."

"Yes ; my father becomes daily more bigoted and inveterate against those who hold your faith ; and I am forced most carefully to conceal my own religious opinions and my intercourse with you since my dear aunt's death. Poor Aunt Margaret ! she was ever my kind friend—supplying the place of a mother to a poor motherless child."

"She spoke of you just before her death, with the warmest affection. You have heard what persecutions she suffered for her strict adherence to the reformed religion. Let us be thankful she was spared the pain of martyrdom—the crown is surely hers !"

"And you—how have you incurred the anger of the Queen ?"

"My non-attendance at mass and at confession were reported to the Bishop of Winchester, and it was discovered that I was

in the habit of studying the scriptures in our English tongue, which is now by law forbidden."

"And is your life in danger?"

"Better men than I am are daily falling victims to the fury of Bonner and Gardiner; many are renouncing their faith through fear, which God keep me from doing! There is no safety but in flight. Have you secured a boat?"

"Yes; my faithful maid Rosa has been down to the beach and used her all-sufficient influence with her sweetheart, Richard Rattenbury, who will have his boat ready at daybreak, as if for fishing. You will know the boat by a red handkerchief fastened to the mast. You are safe here to-night."

"I fear not—unless a place of concealment can be found for me. I have been traced as far as Exeter—soldiers are in pursuit of me, and a few hours may bring them here, though they will scarcely expect to find me in the house of so staunch a Catholic as your father."

"You must run no unnecessary risk. I have kept the secret of the hiding-place you discovered several years ago; you know it was a point of honour between us as children—I little thought we should ever be forced to turn it to account—hark!"

The sound of horse's hoofs was heard in the avenue. Rosa rushed into the room, and in a terrified whisper informed the anxious lovers that several of the Queen's soldiers on horseback were approaching the house. Waiting but a moment to embrace and endeavour to reassure his trembling cousin, Cecil quitted the room by a door which opened into a passage leading to the library, leaving the two women overwhelmed with consternation and grief. Soon the whole household of Sir Stephen Waldron was in a commotion. The soldiers had reached the main entrance, and the leader demanded admission in the Queen's name. The master of the house, hastily leaving the supper table, where he had been listening to a learned discourse of his chaplain, Father Ignatius, himself appeared on the threshold and requested to be informed what errand brought her Majesty's soldiers to his house? "We are in pursuit of your nephew, Cecil Waldron, son of the late Mistress Margaret, widow of your brother, John Waldron, who stands charged with heresy and many grievous crimes committed against the Queen's Majesty. If he be anywhere harboured here I demand that he be instantly delivered up."

"Heaven forefend that my house should be made a harbour for heretics! Cecil Waldron has fallen away from the faith like his mother, and he is henceforth an alien to me and mine. But search an ye will—I would not have a shade of suspicion rest upon my house; and there are nooks and corners at Bovey capable of hiding heretics by dozens."

The captain bowed respectfully, and expressed his regret that his duty obliged him to disturb the repose of a loyal

gentleman and good Catholic ; then, placing a guard round the house, he entered with the rest of his troop. Every room was carefully searched by the soldiers, accompanied by Father Ignatius and several of the domestics of the establishment. Sir Stephen himself led them to his daughter's apartments, where they found poor Eleanor, pale, and in mortal fear, though she retained the ordinary self-possession of her manner. The maid, Rosa, appeared to be busied about some preparations for her mistress's toilet. Eleanor was desired by her father to retire to rest, and assured that there was no cause for alarm. The captain expressed himself satisfied, and was about to order his men to re-mount, when Sir Stephen informed them there was still one place unsearched, to which he wished to conduct them. He then led the way into the court-yard, and entering a large outhouse, showed them a well, and explained that about 80 feet down there was a recess, which had been used for purposes of concealment. The only access to it was by the bucket, which was worked by a large wheel like a treadmill. One of the soldiers, taking a torch, entered the bucket, and three of his comrades getting into the wheel, he was gradually lowered. On arriving on a level with the opening to the recess, he cried to the men to stop, and stepping from the bucket, entered the chamber, which was about 10 feet square. Finding it empty, he placed himself again in the bucket, and was drawn up, glad enough to be on *terra firma* once more. This well is 180 feet in depth, and no other water for drinking purposes is attainable on the premises. Further search being now deemed fruitless, the captain was about to take his departure, but Sir Stephen would on no account suffer him to do so without partaking of his hospitality. The men were nothing loth to rest and refresh themselves in the comfortable kitchen ; and their leader having for the present lost all trace of the fugitive, sat down to enjoy a bottle of old wine with his host, taking the precaution of leaving a sentinel stationed outside. Eleanor had not obeyed her father's injunction to go to rest ; she was still dressed, and kept a dim light burning in her chamber. She was alone, having taken an opportunity during the general confusion, of sending her maid out on some mysterious errand. Towards sun-rise the girl returned, and having listened to what she had to communicate, Eleanor took off her slippers, and taking a light in her hand, proceeded towards the library. All was quiet in the house, the soldiers being asleep in the kitchen, and her father and his guest, with the priest, still sitting over their wine, the captain having refused to lie down. With stealthy steps Eleanor gained the library, and slowly lifted the latch of the door. A terrible fear seized her that Father Ignatius might be sitting up over his books, as was sometimes his custom. On entering the room, however, she found it had no occupant, but, to her dismay, the heavy door slammed behind

her with a stunning noise, and her light was nearly extinguished. She paused a few seconds to listen if all was quiet, and then, taking the library steps, placed them on the hearth under the wide chimney. She ascended the steps, and called in a low voice—

“Cecil—dear Cecil?”

“I am here, all safe,” was the whispered reply. “Give me your hand; we can talk more safely here, if you will venture to come up.” Eleanor took her cousin’s hand, and with his assistance, reached a small apartment formed in the side of the chimney, furnished with a rude table and a bench, on which she was placed by her lover. From some fragments of earthenware which lay on the floor, and an old brass lamp fastened against the wall, it was evident that this had formerly been used as a place of concealment. [This chamber was discovered about five years ago by some workmen employed in repairing the chimney, and was then bricked up.] “There is no time to be lost,” said Eleanor. “Rosa has been to Beer and seen Rattenbury, and all is arranged for your flight. You must contrive to elude the vigilance of the sentinel. Hasten with all possible speed to Beer; on the beach you will find a small boat, with a pair of paddles. Rattenbury’s lugger is waiting near the cave on the west cliff. You and he will have no difficulty in managing the boat. God bless and preserve you!”

They then descended to the library, and unbarring the window with great care, Cecil bade adieu to his cousin, and sprang out into the court-yard. From his knowledge of the premises, he easily avoided the sentinel, and commenced running at full speed; but at the entrance of the avenue he encountered another sentinel, for whom he was unprepared, and had scarcely passed him when a shot whizzed by his ear, and in a few minutes the alarm was given to the soldiers within the house. It took some time to arouse them from their slumbers and get them mounted to start in pursuit; and Cecil, who was a fast runner, had reached the little fishing village of Beer some minutes before his pursuers. He rushed down the narrow rocky street, sprang over the shingles, and found—as he had been told—a small boat close to the water. He quickly pushed it off from the shore, and, springing in, made the best use of his paddles—having been accustomed to boating from his earliest years. He could perceive the lugger under shadow of the cliff, and had nearly reached her when the soldiers arrived at the beach, and some of them, pushing off in a boat, attempted to follow him. A few moments more and Cecil was on board the lugger, when he fired a parting shot at the pursuing boat, wounding the man at the helm; and the soldiers, little used to the sea, and discouraged at the fate of their comrade, gave up the pursuit in despair, while the lugger, making all sail, rounded Beer Head, and was soon out of sight.

## PART II.

### CONCLUSION.

We must pass over an interval of four years, during which many and great changes had taken place in public affairs. Elizabeth had succeeded to the throne of England, the reformed religion was re-established, and all danger for those who adhered to that faith at an end. It was towards the end of summer, and the weather was extremely sultry, when a vessel of foreign rig came slowly round Beer Head, and dropped anchor in the bay. She was evidently steered by some person well acquainted with the locality. With the exception of two young Englishmen, the crew, from their dark complexions and black eyes and hair, appeared to be natives of a southern clime. Leaving the foreigners on board the vessel, the two Englishmen got into a small boat, and commenced rowing towards the shore. Although the sun had nearly reached the meridian, there was no appearance of life and activity on the beach. The boats and nets lay crowded together upon the shingle, but no living creature was to be seen. "It is strangely quiet here," said Cecil Waldron (for it was he). "The men had more of curiosity in your time, Rattenbury. I should have supposed the sight of our ship would have brought numbers to the beach. The people are perhaps making merry at the harvest-home; the weather has been fair for getting in the crops, but, by my life, it is strange!"

The young men sprang upon the beach, pulled up their boat, and then proceeded hastily over the shingle. "I will go to my father's cottage first, by your leave," said Rattenbury; "it is close to the beach, and there we shall learn all you desire to know."

"Do so," replied Waldron; "hasten on, and I will follow you slowly."

The young sailor quickly gained the summit of the steep road leading from the beach, and found himself close to his home. The appearance of the cottage filled him with astonishment and dismay. The little gate was off its hinges, the garden overgrown with weeds, and the door stood open. He entered, but found the place entirely deserted. There were some wood ashes on the hearth, but no other sign of the house having been lately inhabited. By the time Rattenbury had concluded his hasty search, he was joined by his companion, to whom he expressed his great surprise and alarm, and the two went on to inquire at the neighbouring cottages. The second

house and the third presented the same aspect as the house formerly inhabited by Rattenbury. Not a sign of life was to be seen, not a sound to be heard, save the continual ripple of the waves on the pebbles. Passing up the street they reached the small inn in the centre of the village. "I will make another trial here," said Waldron, and he placed his hand against the door, which yielded to his touch. A glance round the kitchen sufficed to convince him it was empty, and he opened a small door which led to a sleeping apartment. A feeling of suffocation oppressed him as he entered—a sickly odour pervaded the room. Something stretched on the floor impeded his progress, and looking down, he saw that it was the body of a man dressed in sailor's clothes, who had apparently been dead some days. A glance at the face was sufficient to confirm Waldron's fears. He rushed from the house, horror depicted on his countenance.

"Merciful Heaven ! it is the plague !" he exclaimed ; " enter not another house as you value your life ; God grant we may find all safe at Bovey ! "

The young men walked with rapid steps through the narrow street of thatched cottages, some wholly deserted, some, they doubted not, still tenanted by lifeless corpses. Passing the small church with its burial-ground, now converted into one common grave, they found themselves, not without a feeling of intense relief, beyond the boundary of the village, and hastened up the steep, shady lane leading to the Manor House. The hedges bloomed with wild flowers, and here and there a rabbit might be seen squatting under the shadow of a fern, or darting across the path. A few minutes' walk brought them to the broad avenue ; the heart of Cecil throbbed with unutterable fears, and his companion was scarcely less agitated. At the entrance to the hall stood the kennel of the house-dog, an old friend of Cecil's. The poor beast lay lifeless, fastened by his chain to the kennel, having died probably of starvation. Slowly now, for his anxiety seemed almost to deprive him of the power of motion, Cecil examined room after room, followed by Rattenbury. In the dining-hall some remains of a repast were visible—in the kitchen some garments and utensils strewed about. On they went, up the broad staircase, through several sleeping rooms, until they reached the apartment occupied by the young Mistress Waldron. Cecil's hand trembled as he raised the latch, scarcely conscious what horrible sight he expected to see within. As he opened the door he heard a faint groan, and, on entering, perceived a female form lying on the bed, in whose pale and inanimate face he almost failed to recognise his once blooming cousin. Stretched across the foot of the bed, in an equally exhausted state, lay the maid Rosa. Eleanor uttered a faint cry of pleased surprise, and held out her wasted arms towards

her lover. He took her hands in his, and gazed with a look of agonised tenderness on the changed face; then remembering the necessity of immediate action, he called to Rattenbury, who was endeavouring to raise his beloved Rosa.

"Open the windows, let in the fresh air, then back with all speed to the ship. Send Diego here; he has some skill in leech-craft, and bring wine and brandy."

Rattenbury lost no time, and the Spaniard, on his arrival, pronounced both the patients to be recovered from the disease, but sinking for want of proper care and nourishment—each being too weak to assist the other.

Cecil and Rattenbury remained in the house, and proved most efficient and tender nurses; and the girls, under the skilful treatment of Diego, towards evening began to revive. During the night a terrific gale sprang up from the south-east, and a heavy storm of thunder and lightning added to the dreariness of their situation. Cecil feared for the safety of the rest of his crew, and early in the morning sent Rattenbury down to the beach, where he found the vessel stranded, and gradually going to pieces. The men, however, were all safe ashore, and endeavouring to save what they could from the wreck.

As soon as Eleanor was sufficiently recovered to listen, Cecil described his adventures during his long absence. On making his escape in the lugger, his first intention was to gain the coast of France; but a gale springing up from the S.S.E. rendered this impossible; and the wind continuing to blow from that quarter, and as they feared to land anywhere on the English coast, they were carried down channel into the Atlantic.

Being scantily supplied with provisions they were glad, on the third day, to perceive a vessel sailing under the Spanish flag, and hoisting signals of distress were taken on board. It proved to be the caravel Corazon, bound for one of the colonies founded by the Spaniards on the coast of Terra Firma. The voyage was successfully made, and on his arrival at the colony, Cecil, by his conduct and soldier-like bearing, gained the good-will of his comrades, and was appointed to a command.

The colony was subject to repeated attacks from the Indians, and in one of these, Cecil, while engaged in leading the defence, encountered hand to hand a chief of gigantic proportions. During the conflict the Indian, finding he was getting the worst of it, closed with his comparatively diminutive antagonist, who must undoubtedly have been slain, had not Rattenbury come to his assistance, and drawn the attention of the chief, who however escaped, leaving Waldron senseless on the field.



On recovering himself, Cecil, who was but slightly wounded, found in his hand a necklace of immense pearls, which he had no doubt seized in the struggle. These he carefully concealed, resolving to keep them as a means of regaining his native country should the times permit. He met with many adventures too numerous to recount here, but to which Eleanor listened with eager interest; and at last having heard that Queen Mary was dead, and that there was no longer any danger of persecution for his religious opinions, he resolved to return home. A dozen of his immediate followers, having no tie in the colony, agreed to accompany him. He therefore sold some of his pearls, fitted out a vessel, and sailed for England, where he arrived as has been related.

Eleanor had a sad tale to relate of her father's severity towards her, on the discovery of her having connived at her cousin's concealment and flight. He caused her to listen daily to sundry arguments and admonitions of Father Ignatius, and threatened at last to place her in a convent. It is probable he would have put his threat in execution had not a sudden and awful calamity happened to prevent it. The plague which was raging in several parts of England broke out at Beer, and the contagion was speedily conveyed to Bovey. Sir Stephen was the first to fall a victim to the disease. Father Ignatius and one of the domestics soon followed; then Eleanor herself was seized with the awful malady, and the remaining domestics fled, as many of the inhabitants of Beer had done, to the neighbouring villages, leaving her with her faithful Rosa, who also soon took the disorder; and no doubt both would have perished but for the timely arrival of their two friends.

Sir Cecil—for by the death of his uncle he succeeded to the title and estates—persuaded his fair cousin on her perfect recovery to bestow on him her long-promised hand; and the danger of infection being over, those of the inhabitants who had fled began gradually to return to Beer. Many families, however, were totally extinct, and Sir Cecil having sold the rest of his pearls, divided the produce among his crew, giving them the option of returning to their own country, or remaining as his free tenants for their life. They all having formed attachments to the fair damsels of Beer, and being truly devoted to Sir Cecil, accepted his offer. Rattenbury of course married Rosa, and was probably the ancestor of the celebrated smuggler, Rattenbury, whose adventures have been published. The Beer men, who were formerly nearly all smugglers, are supposed to have derived their hardihood and daring from their descent from these Spanish adventurers.

In the days of which we have been writing, sanitary measures were not much attended to, and for many years a stream of water was permitted to flow through the street, forming here

and there a stagnant pool, and rendering Beer very unhealthy. In 1646, the plague again visited the place, the infection, it is said, being brought by a foreign vessel. The village was again nearly depopulated, and since that date no burials have taken place in the churchyard. In 1820 the late Lord Rolle caused the stream to be conducted through the street in a regular channel, and built two conduits for the convenience of the inhabitants, so that the water which formerly destroyed the salubrity of the place, now cleanses and purifies it, and Beer may be considered one of the healthiest spots on the coast of Devon.

# ROSA'S WEDDING :

A TALE OF THE OLD SMUGGLING DAYS.

---

## CHAPTER I.

In a lonely part of the western coast of England, many miles distant from any town of great importance, stands a little fishing village, or rather hamlet, which at the end of the last century consisted of a few miserable thatched cottages, with little gardens attached to them, stocked principally with potatoes and cabbages. On the rude hedges which surrounded them might generally be seen exposed, for the purpose of drying, various articles of apparel of a nondescript kind, consisting chiefly of such rough garments as are used by seafaring men ; while outside the door, on a bough of blackthorn, placed upright in the ground for that purpose, or hung upon strings across the cottage walls, specimens of the coarser kinds of fish were often suspended, giving out by no means a pleasant odour to the passer-by. In some of the habitations a little taste was displayed by the addition of a few flowers beneath the diamond-paned, dusky windows, a border of red and white daisies, a few bunches of fragrant pinks, or a large bush of lavender or marjoram, formed an agreeable addition to the scene, and furnished food for the bees, whose straw-thatched habitations might here and there be seen in the garden of some thrifty dame. Some of the cottages were built close to the beach, and these were always surrounded with coils of old rope, fishing nets, and lobster pots, and generally an abundant quantity of oyster and other shells, emptied of their juicy inhabitants. A little cove offered a convenient harbour for vessels ; and the so-called fishing-boats of Sandyhead were large and well-built, and calculated to stand very rough weather. But it was generally known that fishing was but a secondary means of supporting existence among the men of the place ; they had occupation of a far more important and lucrative nature, for they carried on a considerable contraband trade, and though this was not only suspected but a known fact, they were able in general to carry out their plans with impunity, for in those days the laws were

comparatively powerless against them. Though most of the families were, or appeared to be, extremely poor, many a large fortune had been made there from time to time by those who were either most daring or most lucky ; and it was rumoured that many of the gentry of the neighbourhood who kept their servants and carriages, and visited among the old county families, were descendants of men who had formerly made their fortunes in the smuggling trade. One of these was young Mr. Woodford—Squire Woodford, as he was called—to whom belonged a good deal of the property immediately surrounding Sandyhead. Squire Woodford was about thirty years of age, and a bachelor, a general favourite with all the neighbouring families, for he was very lively and agreeable, could sing a good song, and tell a good story, and talk well on almost every subject. He was a grave discussor of politics, a good judge of horses and wine, and noted for his politeness and attention to the ladies. His father had been dead several years, and his mother, a cheerful, hospitable old lady, presided over his establishment. To him belonged the handsome modern mansion standing in its own grounds, about half a mile distant from Sandyhead. A fir copse sheltered it on one side from the south-west winds which prevail in that neighbourhood, and this copse extended for some distance towards the seashore. The house had been built by Squire Woodford's grandfather. There was but one other habitation of any consideration belonging to the village. This was a neat brick cottage, built on the extremity of the cliff, and occupied by a lieutenant of the navy, who had retired on half-pay in consequence of the loss of his right arm, and who was always spoken of as "the captain"—a title which he shared in common with every man who could boast of possessing a boat of any importance. Captain Fielding had a large garden, which was cultivated with great taste under his directions, though few trees or shrubs could be induced to flourish so near the sea. A broad terraced walk commanded a fine view of the beautiful bay, and from it a flight of steps, cut out of the rock, formed a pleasant descent to the beach. Up and down this terrace, the captain, a strong, hale man of little more than forty years of age, would pace many an hour in the fine mornings, or stand, telescope in hand, watching the distant sails as they appeared and disappeared, and smoking his short pipe. But he had excited the enmity of the men of Sandyhead by opposing their contraband traffic and making it his business to discover and thwart their designs, which, having been in the King's service, he thought it his duty to do. The commanding situation of his residence gave him a great advantage in this respect, so that he had several times had an opportunity of observing a suspicious-looking craft as she rounded the head, and giving timely notice to the revenue officers. The neigh-

hours therefore, one and all, united in fearing and disliking him. But Captain Fielding had a daughter, who was as much beloved and admired as her father was dreaded. She might often be seen walking by the captain's side on the terrace or seated with her book or work on the low bench under the flag-staff. Rosa was only seventeen and a child in many of her ways still, though she could lend a helping hand in the house and in the care of her little brothers and sisters ; but Rosa had a lover nevertheless—a real lover, to whom she was actually engaged, and whose wife she was soon to be. This was Maurice Thorne, the young surgeon, who resided at Beachstowe, a village within a mile and a half of Sandyhead. In fact, the latter place formed part of the parish of Beachstowe, and the church stood on an eminence somewhere between the two villages. Many people said Rosa was too young to be married, especially as her lover had as yet no establishment of his own, but occupied furnished apartments in an ancient farm house, and had only a precarious profession to depend upon ; but Maurice was in love and impatient to possess the beloved object, and Capt. Fielding was poor, and it may be nothing loth to decrease in a measure the expenses of a large family. Besides, he was about to relinquish his daughter to a young man on whose steadiness and industry he knew he could depend, for he was by no means a selfish father, but anxious to provide to the best of his power for his numerous progeny. It was true Rosa would be much missed at home at first, but then the second sister, Annie, was growing up fast, and would soon be able to take her place. The wedding-day had therefore been fixed, and the mother and daughters had begun to busy themselves about the simple, but to them important, preparations.

It was Mrs. Woodford's birthday, and the old lady had a fancy for collecting a party of young people round her on that day, so all the gentry of the neighbourhood were assembled at Fir-wood House to do honour to the festival. Maurice Thorne was there as a thing of course, for he was a wonderful favourite with the lady and with her son also, at least so people thought ; and Rosa and her sister were among the prettiest of the girls present, although the former had an air of unusual bashfulness and gravity, perhaps because the wedding day was so near, and every one was aware of the fact.

This would probably be the last time of her appearing in public before taking upon herself new and solemn responsibilities. Maurice had come forward to greet her on her arrival, and they had been partners in the first country dance ; but he did not wish to make his attentions too marked to his betrothed on such an occasion, and he knew also how much she disliked to be the object of knowing looks and sly remarks from observant neighbours, so he reluctantly quitted her side and transferred

his attentions for a time to some of the other ladies. Squire Woodford had led the dance with the daughter of a neighbouring baronet, a lady somewhat past her prime of youth and good looks, but claiming precedence as the person of the highest rank present. As usual, he had spared no pains to make himself agreeable, and succeeded so completely as to find it rather difficult to withdraw himself from the lady's side, though he was in reality eager and impatient to do so. At length, however, he was so fortunate as to have an opportunity of relinquishing her to another partner. Then he walked slowly and indifferently, as it appeared, towards the sofa on which Rosa happened to be seated alone, and placed himself beside her. Woodford was a tall man, well formed, and strongly built. He had remarkably light hair, which, though smooth and shining, had not the slightest tinge of gold or brown to take from its ugly whiteness, nor any inclination to curl. His complexion was colourless, his eyes of a pale blue, large and handsome but for the white eyebrows and lashes; his mouth wide and sensual, but containing a row of white regular teeth, which were displayed in a remarkable manner when he smiled.

Rosa had always felt an extraordinary repugnance to this man; she could scarcely tell why, for he was generally considered good-looking and extremely amiable, and had never failed in attention to herself. Her father also had the highest opinion of his character, and she had never heard him spoken of but in terms of praise.

"What, quite deserted, Miss Fielding?" he said with one of his blandest smiles; "Is my friend, Maurice, so false to his allegiance?"

Rosa smiled in return.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Woodford, he has deserted me, as you see in favour of my sister, Annie; but I am very well satisfied."

"Ah, Maurice is a happy fellow to have won such entire confidence. So they tell me the important day is actually fixed?"

Rosa only replied by a blush, and cast her eyes down on the carpet.

"Well, Miss Fielding," added Woodford, "some men I suppose are born to be more lucky than others."

He sighed, and was silent for a few moments, and in order to change the subject of conversation, Rosa said—

"How well your mother is looking to-night. See! she is actually going to join in Sir Roger de Coverley."

As she spoke she again looked up, and perceived the blue eyes of the Squire fixed on her face in a manner peculiarly unpleasant to her. He smiled again as he met her eye, and rising said—

"Come, Miss Fielding, we should follow so good an example. You will dance with me, will you not?"

Rosa would gladly have refused, but she knew not how to do so, and permitted Mr. Woodford to draw her arm within his, in doing which he contrived to give her hand a very perceptible pressure. She was glad when the evening festivities were over, and she was permitted to walk quietly home in the calm moonlight, under the escort of her lover. Until that night she had never supposed that she was otherwise than an object of indifference to Mr. Woodford. Now, something, she scarcely knew what, had convinced her either that she had in some manner incurred his dislike, or that he regarded her with feelings of admiration, and that the prospect of her speedy marriage was disagreeable to him. She felt disturbed and annoyed, yet blamed herself for indulging in such fancies. In a few days she would be the wife of Maurice Thorne—then it would matter little what were the feelings with which Mr. Woodford had regarded her.

A certain Thursday morning in June had been fixed for the wedding, which was to take place at Beachstowe Church, at eight o'clock precisely. On the previous night Maurice had retired to rest unusually early, but had not been able to sleep for some time, owing to his state of restless excitement. At last, however, his weary eyes closed, his thoughts became confused and wandering, and he was in the middle of a dream in which he was vainly endeavouring to find his way to Beachstowe Church, where he knew that Rosa, in white dress, was standing near the altar, but was hindered by all kinds of inconceivable obstacles; when a loud, sudden knock and ring startled him from his sleep, and he jumped up with the vivid impression on his mind that the church roof had fallen in, and that Rosa and the rest of the bridal party were crushed beneath its ruins. He laughed heartily at his own fears when the knocking was loudly repeated; and he heard a voice shouting out his name beneath the window. It was a summons to attend a patient at a lonely cottage on the cliffs not very far distant; (very provoking at such a time) but the case was an urgent one and of course he must go. It was nearly twelve o'clock; he rose and dressed himself, but unfortunately his horse had been lamed the preceding day, and there was no alternative for him but to walk.

His visit had been paid, and he set out on his return, anxious to regain his snug quarters as soon as possible. The moon was in her first quarter, and it was a dark night, or, rather, morning, for it must have been about two o'clock when Maurice reached a turn in the road from which a winding path led down to the shore. It was low water, and there was a wide expanse of smooth sand between him and the sea. Maurice knew the path well, and was aware that the distance to Beachstowe along the sands was at least half a mile shorter than by the road. He determined, therefore, on returning by that way, and was soon

pacing steadily along the smooth sands, his heart light and gay, filled with joyful anticipations of the morrow. He had proceeded but a short distance, when he perceived a group of men, apparently about eight or nine in number, a little way in advance of him. Two of them appeared to be holding down by force some other person, while the rest were employed in digging a large hole in the sands. Maurice stood still, watching their proceedings, for he had no doubt that they were some of the Sandyhead men engaged in something connected with their unlawful trade, and it would be imprudent for him to proceed. The man who appeared to be detained against his will struggled violently, and spoke in a loud and angry tone. Maurice thought he knew the voice, but as it was in some manner smothered almost instantaneously by those who held down the unfortunate man, he could arrive at no degree of certainty. Silent and horrified the young man continued to gaze awhile. It appeared to him as if some fiends in human shape were about to inter a living victim, and, if the object of their rage were indeed the person he imagined, he would willingly have risked his life to assist and defend him. But then such an attempt would have been madness, for he was only one against many, and had no weapon of defence but a small walking-stick, while they were all probably armed, and active, powerful men. To fly, and give the alarm as soon as possible to the constables at Beachstowe appeared to be the most feasible plan; so he turned and commenced a rapid retreat, directing his course towards the narrow path by which he had descended. But it was too late; he had been perceived by one of the men, who with another immediately followed him. Still, as he was considerably in advance, he hoped to be able to outrun his pursuers, and would probably have succeeded, had not several other men, descending the rocky path, appeared to intercept him. Finding it useless therefore to proceed he turned and faced his pursuers. He was soon seized by the foremost, who, making use of some course and blasphemous expressions, held him tightly till the others came up.

"Holloa, young 'un," exclaimed the second, also laying hold of his arm, "what be you about here?—bless my soul, its only the doctor. I beg your pardon, sir. Handle the gen'lman softly, Bob, will yer?"

"Let me go, fellows," said Maurice, angrily; "though you are both strangers to me, you know, it appears, who I am, and have no need to detain me."

"Yes, I knows yer, doctor, and I'm sorry, upon my word," said the most civil of the two; "but you must bide quiet a bit. You see, w're doing a little business, and if we let's you go before all's straight you'll split maybe, and it will be all up with the cargo as we are a running."



"I'd give you my word, if that were all, to say nothing for several hours about your cargo. But what dastardly work are you carrying on down below there?"

"Oh, never you trouble yourself about that, sir. It's only a lark of some of our fellows, and no harm meant. What do you say, Bob? If the gen'lman gives us his word not to split, shall we let him go?"

"Will you swear, sir, to be silent for three or four hours?" said the other.

"About the other affair, yes. But I won't swear to be silent concerning the violence I have seen committed."

"Then you must come along with us, that's for sartin. But don't alarm yourself, sir; we mayn't have to keep you above a couple of hours at the farthest."

## CHAPTER II.

---

At any other time, probably, Maurice would have thought it his wisest course to accompany the men quietly and submit to be detained for a short time ; but then he was to be married at eight o'clock that morning, and the delay of a few hours would be extremely inconvenient. He endeavoured, therefore, to explain how he was situated, and seemed disposed to make some attempt at resistance, but he had resolute men to deal with, who could be civil only so long as they were not thwarted or opposed. No sooner did Maurice make an effort to put himself in a posture of defence than he was seized, gagged, and dragged down to a boat which lay under the cliffs not far distant. Then he was bound hand and foot, and lifted into the boat, when the two men also jumped in and commenced rowing steadily along under the shadow of the cliffs. Maurice soon formed a guess as to his destination ; he was about to be conveyed to Chalk Cave, a spot which he had sometimes visited from curiosity. It could only be approached by a boat, even at low water, and was quite inaccessible by land. Arrived at this place, he was lifted out of the boat and carried up into the cave, when the man who appeared to give directions to the others ordered the bandage to be removed from his mouth, and then said,—

“You'll have to stay here quiet a bit. It's no good to call out, for we know well enough your voice cannot be heard from this place by nobody ; but we cannot free your limbs lest you should take to the water. I'm sorry, doctor, that I am, but there's no help for it, seeing as you refuses to swear, and it wont be for long. I hopes as you'll make yourself as comfortable as you can, and you'd better take a swig of this here brandy.”

Maurice refused this offer, and the men, jumping again into the boat, rowed quickly away, leaving him bound. He could not exactly follow the advice of his captor to make himself comfortable, but as he was perfectly powerless to help himself, and had no alternative but to remain patiently till some one should arrive to liberate him, he placed himself in the easiest position his situation admitted of, and lay watching the dawning light gradually spreading till he could at last clearly distinguish

the rough ceiling and walls of his strange prison dotted here and there with green tufts of some beautiful marine fern. Into this cave the sea never penetrated, except at spring tides, but below the spot where Maurice lay, among immense blocks of rock covered with sea weed, innumerable species of shell-fish had their habitations, while clusters of beautiful zoophytes lay hidden away in the little pools and crevices. The tide was now fast coming in, and he could hear the sound of the waves dashing against the base of the rocks beneath him. He was uncertain about the exact hour, for though his watch was in his pocket yet, his hands being bound, he had no means of consulting it. As time wore on, however, his impatience knew no bounds, for making every allowance for the discomfort of his situation, which would doubtless cause the time to appear to pass slowly, he felt convinced by the appearance of the sun that the hour fixed for the wedding could not be far distant. Chafed in spirit, weary in body, he tossed from side to side, then lay breathless and still, listening eagerly for the stroke of the oar, which would be the signal of approaching deliverance. He listened, but what did he hear? The monotonous sound of the waves beating against the cliffs, occasionally the shrill cry of a sea-bird, the continual loud cawing of the jackdaws who had their nests in the rocks above and around him—then suddenly another sound, musical and pleasant in itself, but to the prisoner painful beyond expression—the bursting forth of a peal of bells—the bells of Beachstowe Church—ringing for his wedding. The wind came from the direction of the village, and the silver tones of the bells, now loud and clear, now dying away in the distance, could be distinctly heard by the young man, as he lay in his rocky prison. How long Maurice listened to these harrowing sounds he knew not. At last they suddenly ceased. The sun rose higher and higher in the heavens till the heat, even in that shady spot, became oppressive. The lips of Maurice were parched with thirst, and the tight bandages with which his limbs were confined caused every moment a greater degree of pain and weariness, till nature was exhausted, and the fever of suffering and excitement subsided into unconsciousness.

But we must leave Maurice awhile to describe events which had been taking place elsewhere during the hours of darkness. Squire Woodford was in the room which he was pleased to call his study—what studies he was in the habit of pursuing there being best known to himself and a few in his immediate confidence. He had been consulting a chart by the light of a small oil lamp, and reading the latest news which had been received concerning the war with France, then being carried on. Several times he had risen and looked out of the window, returning again to his seat with some signs of anxiety and impatience. At last,

however, he perceived a bright light proceeding from the direction of the beach, which was soon again extinguished. It appeared to be some looked-for signal, for he immediately extinguished his own lamp, hastened downstairs, and opening a small private door with great caution, went out. Every member of the household, with the exception of himself, had retired to rest, and not a light could be discovered. Passing across the lawn, Mr. Woodford proceeded towards some out-buildings situated at the extremity of the fir wood before mentioned. Near one of these—a large barn with wide folding doors—stood two or three men, having a number of bales and kegs on the ground near them. Others were busy unloading more goods from a cart which was stationed in the middle of the fir grove. The Squire unlocked the door of the barn, and, while the men were occupied in carrying in the bales and kegs, entered into conversation in a low tone with the man who appeared to be the principal. Then he took an invoice of the goods and saw them carefully lowered into a subterranean apartment, the existence of which was known only to the initiated, and which had probably for many years served as a receptacle for smuggled goods.

When this was done and the aperture again closed and concealed, he turned to the man with whom he had before been conversing. "And what is this you tell me about Captain Fielding? What work have you been about now?"

"Why, sir, we just took and pinioned his one arm, for he knows how to make a pretty good use of that, and buried him up to his neck in the sand. 'Twas some of the crew of the Lively Jane as did it, for he'd have knowed us Sandyhead men, and it might have brought us into trouble. Howsom'er he'll tell no tales yet."

"What cursed folly; you might have detained him if he put himself in your way, without resorting to violence. This was not done by my orders, mind you. Did you leave him there?"

"Yes, there he is, sure enough, awaiting for the tide to come up and drown him," said the man with a hoarse laugh; "but we shall let him go before that happens anyhow, only he'll have had enough to frighten him a bit, and prevent his meddling with what does not concern him for a while, I fancy."

"Send two or three men to release him instantly—some of the Jane's crew—you, Long Sam, and Bill Bradbury—for it won't do for our own men to appear in this business. But you detained some other person, I think you told me?"

"Oh, only the young doctor, a harmless fellow enough, only he would not swear not to split, so we were forced to keep him for an hour or two."

"The Doctor? Young Maurice Thorne? You must

release him also. Yet stay—where did you say you had left him ?”

“Some of the Jane’s crew took him to the Chalk Cave ; but I’ll send out a boat and have him off directly.”

“No, now I think of it ; he may as well stay there awhile. I’ve a little private score to settle there,” he added, smiling for the first time and shewing his white teeth, though his face wore a very different expression from that which it had worn in his own drawing-room a few evenings before. “You left him a bottle of brandy ?”

“Yes, but I doubts as it will be much use, for his arms was pinioned.”

“Well, he’ll come to no harm there for a few hours, and sea-air is good for the health, you know,” said the Squire with another smile. “Leave him where he is for the present. Now send all the men home, and let the captain of the lugger come to me in an hour’s time to receive his orders. You, Peter, follow me to the house ; I have a letter to write, which I would have you deliver for me.”

The men were dismissed, and he who was called Peter accompanied the Squire by a narrow path through a shrubbery to the house, which they entered by a private door, and then went into the study. Here Mr. Woodford wrote a short note, and delivered it to Peter, with orders to throw it before daybreak over the wall of Captain Fielding’s garden.

Peter was a safe person to be entrusted with letters, as he was wholly unacquainted with the mysteries of reading and writing.

It was nearly five o’clock when Captain Fielding, stiff, weary, and wet, from the effect of his sand-bath, reached his home. The family had been much alarmed by his long absence, but he was unable to satisfy their curiosity at once, being under promise of silence for a couple of hours. A short rest and some refreshment restored him wonderfully, and he declared himself quite able to accompany his dear little Rosa to church at the time appointed. When the period of enforced silence was past, he burst out into bitter invectives against the rascally smuggling fellows of Sandyhead. He had had an inkling the night before that they were going to run a cargo, and had walked along the shore to get a sight of their proceedings, when he had been violently seized by men who were strangers to him—doubtless some of the crew of a suspicious-looking lugger which he had observed through his glass that afternoon coming round the point—pinioned, gagged, and then buried up to his neck in the sand. He firmly believed at first that the rascals meant to leave him there till high water, and he had been waiting in expectation of speedy death, for the waves had advanced to within a few yards of him, when some fellows came to take him out.

Though these also were strangers to him, he had little doubt that the men of Sandyhead were at the bottom of the business.

Another unpleasant circumstance appeared to interrupt the cheerfulness of that wedding morning. Rosa had just donned her wedding apparel, in her neat little room scarcely larger than a good-sized cupboard, with its whitewashed walls and small bedstead with curtains of white dimity. The window seat served for a dressing table, and through the open window branches of clematis and woodbine came creeping into the room. Among their blossoms a few bees were humming about in the bright sunshine, and the clear sound of the bells of the village floated on the breeze. The walls of Rosa's chamber were hung with little pictures—keepsakes of friends, rude drawings of her own and of her brothers and sisters—and many pretty trifles, such as young girls value, were tastefully arranged about the room, with an old china bowl which had belonged to her grandmother, and had descended to her as an heirloom, now filled with fresh, sweet-smelling flowers, in lieu of the steaming punch it had been wont to contain formerly. Rosa sat bidding adieu in thought to all these dear familiar objects, with that half-glad, half-sorrowful feeling with which a young bride quits childhood's home and childhood's simple pleasures, to exchange them for an unknown and uncertain happiness. But Rosa loved and confided in Maurice Thorne, and felt no fear in her future happiness, in spite of those solemn awful feelings she could not repress. She was suddenly roused from her meditations by the entrance of her young sister Annie, with a note in her hand.

"See, Rosa! some one has been writing to wish you joy already, I declare. I found this under the garden wall as I was gathering the flowers to dress the wedding breakfast."

The note was directed to Miss Fielding, and written in a large bold hand resembling that of a school-boy. The contents were as follows :—

"Dear Miss,—If you will follow the advice of a friend, you will not go to church to be married this morning, for the young man is playing you false, and he does not mean to keep his promise, but will fail you to the last moment. So if you do not wish to be made a fool of by going to church and finding no bridegroom, you'll stay quietly at home until you see or hear something of your sweetheart. A WELL-WISHER."

"Who could have dared to write such nonsense as this?" said Rosa, angrily, and she hastened to shew the strange epistle to her father.

"More impertinence of the confounded Sandyhead men," exclaimed the captain; "but never fear, my girl! we know better; Maurice Thorne is not likely to play you a shabby trick."

"Would it not be better just to send over to Beachstowe?" said Mrs. Fielding, anxiously, "and enquire if all is right?"

"No, no," answered her husband, looking at his watch; "there is no time for messages. It is already half-past seven o'clock, and there is a good mile between us and the church. It is time for us to be going, or we shall keep the parson waiting."

So the wedding-party set out to walk to Beachstowe; and a pretty procession they made, passing through the green meadows—the bride, in her simple white dress and straw hat, leaning on the arm of her handsome, proud father; the little brothers and sisters looking so pleased and happy, all dressed in their best, with large bunches of flowers in their hands. Many persons had collected in the church to view the ceremony. The clergyman, in his surplice, already stood by the altar, and the clerk in his best suit of black, with a white rosette, as large as a moderate-sized cauliflower (which Annie Fielding had sent to him the night before), in his button-hole, smiled complacently as he preceded the bridal party. They passed up the aisle, and paused as they entered the chancel, where they remained standing for a few minutes, for the bridegroom had not yet appeared. Then the clerk volunteered to go to Mr. Thorne's residence, and tell him they were waiting. The farmer's wife, with whom Maurice lodged, reported that he had gone to Betty Freeman's on the Cliff, and had not yet returned. She was expecting him every moment. "How unfortunate," said they all, "but then, of course, he could not neglect a case of that kind." So the party sat down in the vestry, and the clergyman returned to the Parsonage to finish his breakfast, which he had taken in a hurried manner, while a lad was despatched to the Cliff Cottage, to hasten the doctor's return. In course of time the messenger arrived, eager and breathless, with the alarming intelligence that Mr. Thorne had remained at the cottage but a short time, and had set out at about half-past two o'clock to return to Beachstowe. Loud were the exclamations of concern and astonishment, as the weeping bride, her head bowed down, and covered with her white veil, was led by her exasperated father through the aisle. The captain could with difficulty refrain from giving vent to his furious feelings even under the sacred roof. The letter, the letter!—there was some truth in it after all.

So the party returned hastily and in confusion along the road to Sandyhead, and the bells suddenly ceased the merry peal that had ushered in Rosa Fielding's wedding morning.

### CHAPTER III.

---

The disappearance of Maurice Thorne gave rise to a great many different conjectures among the people of Beachstowe and Sandyhead. There were a few, no doubt, belonging to the latter place who were able to form a tolerably correct guess as to his fate ; but it was the interest of these to keep silent, and they never, by word or look, suffered the consciousness of any knowledge they might possess to appear. In time the subject almost ceased to be discussed ; everyone went about his usual avocations, and Maurice would only have been remembered when some accident or serious case of illness caused his care and skill to be missed, but for the change wrought in the once blooming, cheerful girl who had been so strangely and cruelly disappointed. Her eyes were now seldom lifted from the ground when she encountered any of the neighbours in her rambles in the lanes or on the beach ; her pale sad face, as she bent over her book at church, resembled that of one who had recently mourned for the dead ; her step had lost its elasticity, her voice its joyous tone. Although on the morning of that unfortunate day the stout captain appeared to have suffered but little from the effects of the treatment to which he had been subjected, his health had in reality sustained serious injury. He had been anxious to prove himself as indifferent as possible to the malice of his Sandyhead enemies, and to convince them that their attempt to intimidate him had been as powerless as it was cruel ; but nature would have her way, and before many days had passed he was seized with a rheumatic fever, which threatened his life. For a long time he was completely prostrated with illness, and when at last he gradually recovered his strength, he would gladly have quitted the neighbourhood where he was surrounded by so many enemies, and where his daughter met with a disappointment, which he looked upon as a disgrace. Not that his dear Rosa had been to blame in any way ; but to have been the dupe of a false and worthless lover, deserted by him on the very eve of marriage, rendering the poor girl's situation humiliating as well as painful. Under other circumstances, Captain Fielding's first thought, on hearing that Maurice was missing, would have been



the fear that some accident had happened to his future son-in-law, but the remembrance of the letter which Rosa had that morning received immediately turned his thoughts in another direction ; and he remained fixed in the opinion once formed of Maurice's treachery, because all he afterwards heard tended to confirm the statement of the letter. But to quit Sandyhead was no easy matter. Not only was he become attached to the place itself, which suited him in a great many respects, but he had chosen out this spot, when first disabled from the service, as his future place of residence, and had expended the greater part of the small property he possessed in purchasing and furnishing the cottage. To leave it, therefore, would have been extremely inconvenient, as the situation of the house, remote from any town, would have reduced it next to impossible to find a profitable tenant. But Rosa ! did she, too, believe in her lover's treachery and desertion ? Oh, no ! like a true woman she loved and trusted still, hoping against hope, and refusing to credit any evil reports which reached her concerning Maurice. That she should never again behold him, that he no longer lived, she felt firmly convinced ; and that the smugglers had been in some way or other the cause of his death she thought more than probable.

Might not the men who had so violently assaulted her father have also encountered her lover in his lonely walk from the cliffs ? And if they had any secret grudge against him—and who could say what unintentional act on his part might have awakened the enmity of men like them—would they have shrunk from any crime to satisfy their brutal rage, and conceal their secret misdoings ? Or, if Maurice had been so rash—bold and courageous she knew him to be—as to resist and threaten to betray them, might he not have been accidentally killed in a struggle, and the body afterwards concealed to evade suspicion ?

These were the gloomy thoughts on which the once merry girl continually brooded in silence, and which she imparted sometimes to her sister Annie, her consoler and chief friend ; and she begged earnestly to be allowed to put on a mourning dress, a request which her parents thought it advisable to deny. Of course the friends and relatives of Maurice, who resided in a distant county, had been immediately informed of his unaccountable disappearance, but they could furnish no clue as to the cause, as he had neither been seen or heard of by them. He had no very near relations, having been left an orphan, and brought up by an uncle, who had now arrived at a very advanced age, and could scarcely be aroused to understand or feel any interest in what had happened. After a time, the horse, and some few articles belonging to Maurice, were sold to pay the rent due, and to settle one or two little accounts left owing in

the village. The rest of his property, which was of no great value, had been packed and carefully laid aside by his landlady. Squire Woodford had from the first shewn great kindness and sympathy towards Rosa, and had been most active in his endeavours to clear up the mystery which enveloped the fate of Maurice. As soon as he ascertained that Miss Fielding believed her lover to have been murdered, he caused strict search to be made in every place in the immediate neighbourhood where a body could most easily be concealed. He made enquiries, and wrote letters in all directions to try and obtain a clue, and at last succeeded in gaining some information, which he imparted to Captain Fielding. There were reasons for fearing, he said, that young Thorne had contrived to get himself mixed up with a gang of smugglers, and that for some time he had been a party to their illicit transactions. On the very night he was missed, a smuggling lugger, not belonging to Sandyhead—the same which the Captain had himself observed—had been lying-to in the bay, and there was every reason to suppose that a very valuable cargo had been run during the early hours of the morning. The men who assaulted Captain Fielding were no doubt part of the crew of that vessel. Some intelligence concerning the design had been conveyed to the revenue officers, but too late to prevent the landing of the cargo or the escape of the lugger. It was possible that young Thorne, thinking discovery to be inevitable, and wishing, also, perhaps, to shirk his engagement to Miss Fielding, had formed the cowardly resolution of departing in the vessel. Mr. Woodford had also contrived to ascertain the fact that this very vessel had afterwards been seized, with all on board, by a French cruiser. Much of this information, he hinted, he had gained by bribing a Sandyhead man, whom he knew to be intimately acquainted with all the smuggling transactions carried on in the neighbourhood; considering any means fair to satisfy the mind of his friend, Captain Fielding, and, if possible, that of his daughter. He left it to her father to withhold this communication from Rosa, or to impart it as he should think best; but the captain decided that it would be best for his unhappy child at once to learn all the facts, and to form her own conclusions. Rosa felt grateful to Mr. Woodford for the trouble he had taken on her account, and the really kind and considerate manner in which he had behaved throughout the whole sad business; but she remained true to her opinion of Maurice after all. Nevertheless, her feelings towards the squire, which had almost amounted to dislike, and undergone a great change. She had learnt to lean on him for counsel and assistance, to look to him to gain all possible information for her on the subject nearest her heart, and to watch for his coming with the continual hope that he might be able to impart something of consolation, and

his visits were so frequent, his exertions in her cause so indefatigable, and his words and manner so gentle and compassionate, she could not help entertaining towards him grateful and friendly feelings. Her father sometimes remonstrated with her almost angrily, concerning what he considered her infatuation ; but Woodford, even in assuring her, as he did at last, of his firm conviction of Maurice's unworthiness, did so with such apparent reluctance, with so many expressions of pain and regret, and argued with her so quietly and reasonably, that his words produced a greater effect than those of any other person. Still she would only reply,

"Mr. Woodford, I know that he is dead, and to be permitted to mourn for him just as a widow might mourn is all the favour that I ask. You are my kindest, best friend ; speak for me to papa, that I may be suffered freely to indulge my sorrow."

Woodford was cautious in his words and conduct. He was a good diplomatist, and careful of injuring his own cause by being too precipitate ; therefore he never allowed his real feelings towards Rosa to be made manifest, till time had in a measure softened her grief, and numerous little acts of courtesy and friendship on his part had paved the way for the expression of warmer feelings. When at last his looks and manner gave rise to the supposition that his heart was really touched, he suffered it rather to appear that the deep interest he had felt in her sorrows had ripened into a warmer attachment than that it had been the effect of any tender feelings he had formerly entertained towards her. When Rosa first became aware of his sentiments, the knowledge inspired her with mingled feelings of pleasure and pain. With the vanity natural to a young girl who had seen nothing of the world, and been little accustomed to flattery and the attentions of the other sex, she felt proud and gratified at having made another conquest and won the heart of a man so generally admired and respected as Mr. Woodford. At the same time she felt grieved to think that she must be the means of causing so kind a friend much pain and anxiety, for as yet the idea of her ever proving false to the memory of her lost lover appeared wholly impossible. When the declaration was actually made, and she was forced to give a positive answer, she did so with tears and expressions of the deepest regret ; still the answer was a refusal, and a decided one. For some time Mr. Woodford did not press his suit, but the expression of deep melancholy in his face when in her presence, and the sad tone of his voice when he addressed her, continually smote upon the heart of Rosa, and caused her even sometimes to ask herself the question whether it was right thus morbidly to cherish the memory of the dead or lost, while it was in her power to add so materially to the happiness of the living. Captain Fielding had

also become aware of Woodford's attachment to his daughter, and to him the prospect of a union between them afforded the greatest satisfaction. He easily found means to convince the Squire that nothing would make him so happy as to see him the husband of Rosa, and that he would use all the influence he possessed over his child to induce her to give her consent. Thus encouraged, Woodford ventured once more to make an appeal to Rosa, and this time with greater success; for the compassionate feelings of the poor girl had been excited by her lover's saddened and altered manner, and the consideration he had shewn in being silent so long on the forbidden subject. In addition to all this, she had to listen to the urgent entreaties of her parents and friends, even her favourite sister Annie joining in the efforts to persuade her, for she imagined that her dear sister's future happiness and the total forgetfulness of the past sorrow, would be best secured by this marriage. Old Mrs. Woodford had died a short time before, rather suddenly, and Rosa was aware that it had been her earnest wish to see her son happily married, and that she quite approved of his choice, though not a desirable one in a worldly point of view. So it happened that, urged on all sides, and troubled and perplexed by a host of conflicting feelings, she agreed to become Woodford's wife, and suffered him to hold that hand in his which had once been promised to another, and to seal the contract with a kiss.

But Rosa was not happy. Often as she sat by Woodford's side, listening to his tender expressions of ardent affection, memories of past days would rise before her, when she had heard similar words spoken by one whom she should never again behold on earth—words which had awakened in her heart very different feelings from those of listless indifference with which she listened now. Often, too, would the image of Maurice haunt her in her dreams—now rising like a vengeful spirit to reproach her with falsehood to his memory—now stretched pale and cold on some lonely beach, with the salt waves dashing over him—now engaged in a mortal struggle with murderous foes, and falling mangled and bleeding, calling on her name.

Thus it was that Rosa, though an engaged bride, recovered neither the bloom of her cheek nor the lightness of her step, nor any of the glad girlish feelings which had so long been banished.

## CHAPTER IV.

---

### CONCLUSION.

Between two and three years had elapsed since the disappearance of Maurice Thorne, and no tidings had ever been received of him. We must introduce the reader once more to the study of Mr. Woodford, where that gentleman was seated early one morning, examining some important despatches he had just received. About this time motions were continually being brought forward in the House of Commons for making peace with France, and the news had just arrived that Lord Malmesbury was about to take a journey to Paris to propose terms on the part of the British Cabinet. Many of the people of England were desirous of a cessation of hostilities, and great hopes were entertained that the negotiations then being carried on would prove successful. But to Woodford the prospect of a speedy peace with France was not an agreeable one, for certain private reasons of his own, and it appeared desirable that he should mature his plans as quickly as possible, lest any untoward event should happen to frustrate them. After pacing up and down the room for half-an-hour, revolving various projects in his mind, he determined at once to prevail on Rosa and her father to fix the wedding-day. Accordingly he hastened to the cottage, and used so many clever and specious arguments to persuade the captain that a long engagement would be prejudicial to his daughter's peace of mind, that he was soon convinced; and Rosa's pity being excited by the account her lover gave of the dreariness of his home since his mother's death, she agreed, though with reluctance, to fulfil the engagement she had made at the end of the following month. So Rosa's wedding-day was again fixed, and again preparations were made for the important event.

Once more the bells of Beachstowe Church are ringing to announce a wedding, and the same aged priest waits to pronounce the words of solemn blessing, in the presence of a numerous congregation assembled in the church. But not, as formerly, the simple bridal procession is seen approaching through the green fields, for Rosa Fielding is about to become

a rich man's bride now, and it is considered fitting that a greater degree of display should grace the ceremony. Several carriages have drawn up to the gate of the churchyard, and a pale, fragile-looking girl, elegantly dressed in white, has been assisted from one of them, and is led towards the altar by her delighted father, looking quite young and handsome in the naval uniform, which he has resumed for the auspicious occasion, where she is immediately joined by the eager and happy bridegroom. The bridesmaids and friends have ranged themselves round the pair, forming a semi-circle of pleased, anxious faces ; the sun shone brightly through the panes of stained glass, casting a rosy hue over the bride's white face and whiter garments ; whispering and movement have ceased among the spectators, who stand silently waiting the commencement of the ceremony, every eye turned in the direction of the altar. All is ready ; the pair about to be united by an indissoluble tie are kneeling side by side, and the voice of the priest has already begun the solemn address to the assembled congregation. But who is he who quickly, though quietly, enters the church by the western door, and remains standing in the aisle near the font, by which he is partly concealed ? No one has observed his entrance, for the eyes and thoughts of all are fixed on the interesting scene which is taking place at the altar. Had there been time for observation, he would not have passed unnoticed, for his appearance and dress are strange, and there is an angry flash in his dark eye, and a glow on his sunburnt cheek which prove him to be under the influence of some strong excitement.

Motionless he stood awhile, yet his countenance wore an expression of intense eagerness, as if he with difficulty restrained himself from rushing forward at once to interrupt the ceremony. He waited, however, till the conclusion of the opening address, but when the words had been pronounced, "Therefore, if any man can shew any just cause why they may not lawfully be joined together, let him now speak, or else hereafter for ever hold his peace"—he advanced with rapid steps up the aisle, and standing immediately in front of the altar, said in a loud and distinct voice,

"I—Maurice Thorne—am here to forbid the marriage."

A shriek, loud and piercing as the cry of a death agony, burst from the lips of the bride, as she fell forward against the communion rails. The bridegroom made an attempt to support her, for he had risen suddenly to his feet, and was gazing with an expression of mingled fury and terror at the dreaded rival, who had arrived so inopportunately for him, to crush him in the moment of victory. For some minutes words seemed to forsake him, but Captain Fielding supporting his trembling daughter with his one powerful arm, said angrily,—

"Maurice Thorne, I ask you by what right have you dared to interrupt this ceremony?"

"By the right of a prior engagement, sir," answered Maurice, proudly; "was not your daughter my promised wife? and were we not to have been united in this very church, three years ago?"

"Yes, and by deserting my child, and leaving her an object of scorn and ridicule, you forfeited all right over her whatever. She is quite at liberty to form another tie."

"Captain Fielding, could you wrong me so far as to suppose me capable of wilfully deserting your daughter, whom I loved more than my life! I am prepared to explain all; but if my long absence has weakened Rosa's regard, and she really prefers another, I am, of course, willing to resign my claims. Only if you have any regard for her happiness, suffer me to speak a few words to you before the ceremony proceeds."

"You hear, sir," said Woodford, turning to the clergyman, "Mr. Thorne has no legal impediment to urge; I beg you will not notice the interruption."

"But is Miss Fielding also anxious that the ceremony should proceed?" answered the clergyman, looking towards Rosa.

"No—for pity's sake, no!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "If Maurice Thorne still lives, I can never, never marry another. I thank God it was not too late!"

"You shall answer to me for this, young man," said Woodford, turning to Maurice and grinding his teeth with rage.

"You have something to answer for to me," said the other, coldly. "We will settle our accounts by-and-bye."

Was there a fatality connected with poor Rosa Fielding that she should stand twice before the altar, decked as a bride, and return as she came?

But very different were her feelings the second time, as she quitted the church, from those bitter ones which had oppressed her on a former occasion. Her mind had suddenly been relieved from a terrible burden—she was satisfied, unspeakably glad.

The story Maurice Thorne had to relate was listened to with the greatest curiosity and astonishment. As we have before related, he had become perfectly unconscious in the Chalk Cave, and on recovering his senses had found himself stretched in a hammock in the cabin of a small vessel, pitched to and fro on rather a rough sea. In a little while he received a visit from one of the men by whom he had been captured on the previous night, and was informed by him that the vessel was the *Lively Jane*, a smuggling lugger, now bound for the coast of France; but by whose orders, or for what reason he had been placed on board, he vainly endeavoured to ascertain. What would have

been his fate if the vessel had succeeded in reaching her destination Maurice never knew, for just as she came in sight of the coast of France, the *Lively Jane* was chased, and finally captured by the French frigate *La Tortue*, then on her way to the West Indies, and all on board were made prisoners of war. Long, indeed, did the subsequent voyage appear to the unhappy young man, agitated as he was by painful thoughts, dreading the effects of his strange and unaccountable absence on his beloved Rosa, and reduced to the companionship of a rude and lawless set of men, the crew of the *Lively Jane*, his comrades in misfortune. Soon after *La Tortue* neared the Island of Martinico, and while she was cruising off the coast, several of her crew were attacked with yellow fever, and the captain of the *Lively Jane* was one of the first on board who fell a victim to this complaint. During his short illness Maurice attended him with the greatest care and assiduity, and awakened the poor fellow's sense of gratitude in so great a degree, that, in his comparatively calm intervals before death, he made a full confession of all his misdeeds, and related the circumstances which had led to Maurice's captivity. Thus he became aware that he had been forcibly carried away, and placed on board the lugger by the directions of Mr. Woodford, and also learned all the particulars of that gentleman's connection with the smugglers, and of the many nefarious transactions in which he had been engaged. In what manner he had incurred the enmity of the 'Squire, or what was his object in getting him out of the way, he was at a loss to guess, neither could he gain any information on that subject, as his informant was himself ignorant of the 'Squire's motives. He had simply obeyed orders without caring to ask questions. But afterwards by degrees an idea something like the truth dawned upon the mind of Maurice, and added to the bitterness of his captivity. Several of the crew of the frigate had died of the fever, and the surgeon himself had sunk under the fatal malady, while the captain was supposed to be at the point of death. As Maurice had displayed great skill in treating one or two cases which had occurred among his fellow prisoners, he was called upon to attend the captain, who fortunately recovered under his care. On discovering that he was a surgeon by profession he afterwards confided to him the medical charge of the ship for the remainder of the voyage, and satisfied with his services, and especially grateful for the cure performed upon himself, he used his influence in obtaining for the young man not only the promise of liberty, but a handsome gratuity from the French Government. At the end of two years the frigate quitted the West India Station, under orders to return to France; but Lord Malmesbury's offers of negotiation having been refused by the French Government, the war continued to rage with increased violence, and before *La Tortue* had reached her



destination, she was seized after an obstinate engagement by Captain Lumsdale, of the *Polyphemus*, one of Vice-Admiral Kingsmill's squadron, and brought into Cork Harbour. Thus Maurice was again free after his long captivity, and without a moment's delay he started on his journey to Beachstowe, wild with anxiety to see his beloved Rosa, and to account to her for his long absence. On his way to the village he had been surprised to see several carriages stationed opposite the church, and on making enquiries of one of the servants, he was informed, to his horror and dismay, that the wedding between Miss Fielding and Woodford was actually taking place. Half mad with rage and despair he rushed into the church, just in time to prevent the tying of the knot, which would have ruined his own hopes and rendered Rosa Fielding miserable for life.

Woodford had retired to his own house immediately on quitting the church, for he perceived that disgrace and failure alone awaited him. Rosa earnestly entreated her lover to leave the wretched man to himself and his own accusing conscience, and not attempt to punish him either through the law or otherwise. But in those days the false code of honour rendered it necessary, in the opinion of gentlemen, to wipe out all injuries with blood, and Maurice was not proof against the prejudices of the age in which he lived.

So a meeting took place secretly, at an early hour one morning in the fir grove, when Mr. Woodford received a slight wound, which disabled him for a short time, and satisfied Maurice's desire for vengeance. Before many months had elapsed Firwood House, with all thereunto belonging, had been sold; and its master had departed, few knew or cared whither. Every one agreed in considering it a happy circumstance that a merciful Providence had removed Mrs. Woodford before the discovery had been made which led to her son's failure and disgrace. Whether she had been a party to the unlawful transactions in which he had suffered himself to be involved, or whether she had been wholly kept in ignorance concerning them, was never positively known. In course of time Firwood House contained new occupants, and the Woodford family were almost forgotten.

In the centre of the village of Beachstowe a pretty little cottage had been built for the residence of the young surgeon and his wife. The aged uncle of Maurice had died during his absence, leaving by his will a small property to his nephew, and he was thus enabled to provide a better home for Rosa than he had first been able to offer her.

Again the merry bells are sounding from the ivy-covered tower of Beachstowe Church; and the fair girl on whose cheek the bloom of renewed health has already begun to appear—

whose eyes once more shine with their former lustre is again attired in the simple white dress which had been prepared for her first bridal day ; and the most superstitious among the villagers talk about signs and omens, and with grave portentous looks declare their conviction, that no good luck can possibly attend the day—that there is a spell at work to hinder Rosa Fielding's marriage. But in spite of these gloomy predictions, no unforeseen accident occurs this time to interrupt the ceremony ; and, amid tears and blessings, the new-made wife is led from the marriage altar by him to whom she had been so long united in heart.

## THE VICAR'S STORY.

---

The welcome month of September had arrived, and I prepared myself thoroughly to enjoy my annual six weeks' holiday—the exchange of dingy, comfortless chambers in the City for cheerful drawing-rooms in pleasant country houses, or snug parlours in distant sea-side lodgings, where pen, ink, and parchment might be discarded for a time, and mind and body invigorated by rest and fresh air, and friendly society. On this occasion I had determined to pay a visit to a certain cousin of mine, the vicar of a rural parish in Sunnyside; and, as he was still unmarried, I promised myself an agreeable week of bachelor freedom with my old friend, who had been my crony at school and college. I found Theodore Grant comfortably established in a pretty vicarage-house, which I soon discovered was undergoing a gradual course of preparation for the reception of another inmate, in the shape of a fair mistress, who was to reign alike over Theodore's home and heart, and on whose charms and merits he was inclined to expatiate in a manner somewhat wearisome to the listener. I sighed as I observed how little my friend was improved by falling in love, and wondered whether as great a change could ever be wrought in myself by a similar catastrophe. But as worthy Theodore Grant is not the hero of the tale I propose to relate, I forbear to dwell longer either on his merits or his weaknesses, or to enter into any further description of the pleasant spot on which I earnestly hope he may spend a long and useful life.

A few days after my arrival at the vicarage, my friend requested me to accompany him in a walk to a neighbouring farm-house, as he had some business to arrange with its occupant. A path-way through fields by the side of a pretty winding river, which

the vicar assured me was a capital trout stream, conducted us to the house, a large grey building of doubtful antiquity, whose narrow-latticed windows were partially obscured by the branches of a huge vine which extended over its front. This vine might have been imagined to be equally ancient with the house itself, so thick were the stems spreading in every direction ; and I remarked with curiosity that one large branch extended across to the opposite side, forming an arch over the entrance to the farmyard, and wondered how, when the tree was young and pliant, this had been effected. Passing through a small gate we entered a garden, and proceeded along a narrow path, with beehives on one side and currant bushes on the other ; while the borders contained a variety of sweet and homely flowers, of such kinds as bloom in the autumnal season—flowers which would be out of place no doubt in a nobleman's parterre or a fashionable lady's drawing-room, but which must rank among Nature's fairest works nevertheless. The front door, which was of massive oak, studded with nails, stood open, and in answer to my friend's knock the lady of the house herself came forward to receive us—a prim, stately-looking personage, of middle age, dressed in a style in defiance of all modern ideas of the elegant and becoming, and having rather a stern expression of countenance which, at first sight, rendered her appearance somewhat unprepossessing. A smile lighted up her features, however, on perceiving Mr. Grant. The maidens were out apple-picking ; she said she was alone in the house ; so we were politely requested to enter, and found ourselves in a large room, which I know not whether to designate as kitchen or parlour, whose scrupulously clean floor and polished oak furniture gave evidence of much industrious labour bestowed upon them. While the vicar and the lady transacted their business in another part of the room, I was requested to partake of some cowslip wine and seed cake which Miss Kennedy had placed on the small round table in the recess of the window for our refreshment ; and, nothing loth to avail myself of the good lady's hospitality after my long walk, I amused myself meanwhile in observing the old-fashioned appearance of everything I saw around me. A wood fire smouldered on the hearth, and above it a framed engraving, yellow with age, representing the Death of Abel, formed the only ornament, unless certain nondescript utensils of shining metal ranged on the lofty mantelpiece deserved that appellation. I might have been more particular in my observations, perhaps, had I previously learnt to associate any interest with the place ; as it was I took but a cursory glance, and when my friend had concluded his parley with Miss Kennedy, and acceded to her request that he would follow my example in partaking of her good cheer, we bade our polite hostess adieu, and set off homewards.

"A curious old place, and a quaint old lady!" remarked I, as soon as we had passed the precincts of the flower garden.

"True," replied the vicar; "and, as you may suppose, there are strange and sad stories attached to the house, though I am only acquainted with one of them."

"A ghost story, of course? Come, let us hear it."

"No; not exactly that, either. But, perhaps, as you are fond of scribbling, the tale might furnish a subject for one of your pen-and-ink sketches."

I saw the vicar had made up his mind to tell the story, and of course I expressed an eager desire to hear it:—

"Some years ago—I cannot be particular about dates—the Charter Farm belonged to Richard Kennedy, a good farmer, but a somewhat austere hard man. At the time of which I speak Richard was a widower, and the father of two grown-up sons. Stephen, the elder, resembled his father in person and disposition. He was plodding and industrious, up early and late whenever the business of the farm required his presence, a severe master to all placed under his authority, but, withal, a man of the strictest integrity, and a kind and dutiful son. Mark, the younger, was of a wholly different character. Wild, idle, and fearless as a boy he was continually incurring censure for some wanton act of mischief, or careless neglect of work. While Stephen was constantly employed in some industrious labour, Mark seldom consulted anything but the amusement of the present hour; but he was handsome, lively, and agreeable, and as he grew up, all the neighbours said no one could help loving Mark, whatever his faults might be. Between the brothers, however, there existed little affection. Whether Stephen was annoyed by Mark's idleness and love of pleasure, in consequence of which so much extra work devolved upon him, or whether he was jealous of the superior attractions with which he could not but be aware his brother was gifted, he was accustomed to treat him with coldness and asperity—a course of conduct which Mark resented with scorn and defiance. But the young man really loved his father, and was seldom led into any display of violence towards him, whatever the provocation.

"During his wife's lifetime Richard Kennedy had taken an orphan niece into his family, and, after the death of her aunt, Grace Morland, who had then reached the age of womanhood, continued to reside at the farm, as her uncle's companion and housekeeper. Everyone loved Grace, from the stern old farmer himself down to the half-witted ragged boy who drove the cows to milking in the evening, and the old house-dog, Snarler, who was a terror to all tramps and vagrants venturing to approach the farm-yard, and sometimes to honest folks as well whose appearance did not guarantee the absence of evil intentions.

"Mark also loved Grace with a love that had increased day by day since the time when he played with her as a little child in the hayfields in the summer evenings, and helped her to mount to the top of the high rick, or to climb into the heavy waggon. Could he fail to love her? For was it not she who always stood between him and his father's anger, who pleaded for him when in disgrace, concealed his boyish misdemeanours, soothed him in his angry moods, and nursed him in sickness and pain? And Grace's whole being was wrapped up in Mark; and the more the father and brother inveighed against his idleness and passion and self-will, the stronger grew the girl's love and the warmer her tone and the brighter the flash of her eye as she spoke in vindication of him. The old man would give way to a half smile of satisfaction on perceiving the interest shewn by his pet Gracie, as he was wont to call her, for his youngest son, though it was a subject of regret to him that her affections had not rather been fixed upon the elder, whom he considered more worthy of her.

Photographs were not in those days, and there has been no portrait handed down to prove the fact; but those who remember her say that Grace Morland was one to excite admiration in all who saw her—in fact, as lovely a girl as one would wish to find in a lonely farm house in a quiet corner of Sunnyside. But Grace had one fault—I should rather say weakness—which she had inherited from her dead mother, or been taught by her at an early age. She was timid and sensitive in the extreme, believed in all the superstitions of the country people, and put as much faith in charms and omens and the power of the evil eye as if she had been born a century earlier.

"One lovely evening early in the summer, when the trees were loaded with fragrant apple-blossoms, and the banks blooming with cowslips, blue-bells, and late primroses, Grace Morland sat on the trunk of an uprooted apple tree, in the orchard at the back of the farm, resting her head on her hands, while her long hair fell over her face, as if to conceal the tears which were plenteously flowing. Mark stood by her side, his countenance wearing a dark and angry expression.

"'Grace,' he said, 'I am a wretched, doomed man. If it were not for you my life would be worthless to me. You won't utterly condemn me like the rest, will you, Grace?'

"'I shall always love you, happen what may. But, oh, Mark—Mark, how could you do it?'

"'Indeed, I never meant to do it; I would have killed myself sooner. But I have a bad, vile temper, as they say, though I would not own it to *them*; and when Stephen provoked me beyond all bearing with his taunts, and his lectures, and his hypocritical self-righteous boasting, I forgot for the moment what it was I held in my hand. I struck him a blow with the

spade, but when I saw the blood flow I felt fit to curse myself for the deed.'

"'You don't think the injury is *very* serious?'

"'No, no, thank God, as far as I can learn no great mischief was done; but father and he are sure to make the most of it.'

"'Well, dear Mark, you will tell Stephen, then, how it happened, and that you did not mean to injure him, only you were led away by your passion, and ask—'

"'Ask his pardon, Grace? I never will—not if I were to die for it! In the first place he would never forgive me from his heart, even if he made a pretence to do so; and, besides, I could not demean myself to him, my pride would not let me—at least not *now*. Just after this happened I think I could have said, Stephen, I am sorry; forgive and forget, man; but after father spoke as he did, and called me another Cain, and no better than a murderer, and told me I must submit to my elder brother, and obey his directions, and never dare to lift so much as my voice against him, then my spirit rebelled all the more powerfully, and I knew there never could be goodwill again between Stephen and me, for I could not submit to be under him.'

"'But, Mark, if things go on in this way it will lead to something terrible.'

"'I don't intend that it should. Certainly, if I were to remain here I could not answer for controlling myself; but I can never live at home after this—never, never! I am going, Grace; and it was to tell you that, and to wish you good-bye that I asked you to come out here this evening.'

"'Going, Mark! Oh! where can you go?'

"'I mean to enlist as a soldier. Who knows but I may turn out worth something after all, and serve my king and country, and win honour and gold, and come back to my little Gracie. Don't cry so, my little darling; it breaks my heart to have to leave you behind, but you'll be true to me always?'

"'Oh, Mark, must you really go?'

"'There is no help for it,' he said, seating himself by her side; and, placing his arm round her, while he smoothed back the long ringlets from her flushed brow, he added, 'You will be true—true always? Look at me, and tell me that.'

"'True till death, Mark,' replied she, raising her eyes to his, solemnly and sadly; 'nothing but death can part you and me.'

"'Then give me a token.'

Grace placed her hand in her bosom, and drew thence a crooked sixpence with a hole pierced in it, which she wore attached to a piece of narrow black ribbon round her neck.

"'There, Mark,' she said, 'I have worn it for three years for good luck, but I can part with it to you, dearest. Keep it as long as you live.'

"'As long as I live and you are faithful to me.'

"'Amen!' replied Grace, solemnly.

"Later that evening the family assembled as usual at supper in the best kitchen, but silence and gloom reigned among the once cheerful and social party. The old man, his face still flushed with the violent anger which had not had time to cool or be melted into sorrow, occupied his accustomed place at the head of the board. On his right sat Stephen, partaking heartily of the meal in surly silence, his forehead bound with a broad white bandage, streaked here and there with blood. Mark sat gloomily apart, declining to partake of food, but taking a draught now and then from the tall cider-cup which stood beside him, and watching the weeping Grace, whose tears, in spite of all her efforts to restrain them, would continue to flow. Now and then the old man's eyes turned with a meaning expression towards the picture which then, as now, hung over the mantel-piece—the first parents blending in mute agony over the lifeless son, the outcast, the murderer, hastening forth in perpetual exile, his punishment of eternal remorse and misery already begun. Every detail of that accusing picture seemed present to Mark's mental vision, though he never raised his eyes to the spot where it hung. Grace Morland felt the force of the silent reproach intended to be conveyed to her lover, but this time she had not ventured to speak one word in his behalf. She was thinking of the long parting which was so soon to take place between herself and him, and was completely unnerved by the shock of her first great trouble. She alone knew that this was the last meal those four would ever partake of together. When the old man rose to offer up the customary thanksgiving it might have been well to have added a prayer for the softening of the stony heart and the subduing of the unforgiving spirit.

"At a very early hour the next morning Mark quitted the farm, carrying with him only a stick and a small bundle, and leaving neither note nor message behind. When at the breakfast hour his absence was discovered, a farm labourer came forward with the intelligence that he had met the young master about daybreak, as he was coming to his work, walking quickly along the road, and that he said, in passing, 'Good-bye, Sam; I'm going to fight the king's enemies. Tell them at the farm 'twill be many a long day before they see me again.'

"The old house seemed a dreary home to Grace after Mark's departure, and as she quietly pursued her household duties, her pale cheek and languid air of melancholy pained all who saw her. It is true the old farmer endeavoured by increased tenderness of manner to sooth the young heart which he knew grieved



for his self-banished son, and by many a kind word and considerate action Stephen strove to prove that he also sympathized in her sorrow and bore her no ill-will for the preference she had shewn for Mark. These occasional displays of feeling made Grace think that Stephen was not quite the cold, stern character she had once thought him.

"As months passed away, and no tidings were received from Mark, the girl's spirits grew more and more depressed, and she became the continual prey of nervous fancies. She remembered with horror that it was on a Friday the unfortunate *fracas* took place between Mark and his brother. Her dream-book was frequently consulted, for her sleep was disturbed by many confused and painful fancies; and as she wandered about the farm gardens and orchards, or sat with her knitting by the spacious fire-side, she would indulge in morbid musing over the ideas the last night's visions called forth. A skull, or a coffin—a raven, or a bloody hand—'Sickness and death—sickness and death!' she kept repeating to herself, 'But how soon—and for whom?'

"Polly, the dairy-maid, was sometimes appealed to as an authority in these matters, and her opinion and advice tended rather to increase than diminish her mistress's fears. It was at her suggestion that Grace at last summoned courage to consult the 'lucky woman,' whose wisdom and power to foretell future events was not to be called in question; for had she not foretold, a twelvemonth come Michaelmas, that Polly herself would receive a present from a fair-haired young man, and was she not now keeping company with Timothy, the ploughman, whose hair was certainly light, not to say reddish, and had he not brought her a handsome fairing only a fortnight ago?

"Black Sue, as she was called, the lucky woman, resided in a miserable hovel by the road which crossed the large common separating this village from a neighbouring hamlet. Sue's husband had been a quarryman, but she had been many years a widow, and out of a family of ten children had only one living—a deformed, half-witted fellow of about forty, who still went by the name of Black Sue's boy. Several of her sons, it was said, had died sudden and violent deaths, one having been killed in the quarry, and another drowned at sea, while the career of three daughters had terminated still more disastrously. If Sue had the power of foretelling future events, certainly it had not enabled her to ward off misfortune from her own family; but then her disciples reasoned 'that whatever was to be must be,' and 'that there was no struggling against fate.' She now earned her subsistence by out-door work at the farm houses, in which her son was also employed, and added a trifle to her gains by telling fortunes to the credulous, and pre-

scribing remedies for cattle and human beings supposed to be bewitched.

"The wide common was gay with purple heath, and among the fragrant shepherd's thyme hundreds of wild bees pursued their busy labours, when Grace Morland first found her way to the wise woman's cottage. The door was open, and the harsh voice of the beldame was heard within, calling to her 'boy' to get out and gather sticks to make the kettle boil. Her son left the house slowly, with a stupid, sulky air, and, perceiving Grace, who had paused in some alarm at the threshold, said, in a deep, cracked voice,

"'Didst thee want my mammy, miss?'

"'Walk in my pretty young lady,' said the old woman, hobbling towards Grace. 'Thee's the young missis at the farm, Grace Morland, I guess? There's no hiding from Black Sue the name or business of any that come within her door.'

"'I do not care to conceal my name,' replied Grace; 'I am Grace Morland, and my business—'

"'Thy business is to get news of the young master. Am I near the truth, lass?'

"'I wish to hear news of Mark,' replied Grace in a trembling voice. 'Does it lie in your power to tell me where he is, what he is doing, whether he still lives?'

"'All things lie in my power, lass, but such news must be bought with silver money. Thy uncle grudges thee naught, folks say.'

"'I have silver money enough,' she said, taking a small purse from her bosom.

"'That is well,' replied Sue; 'Come in, my pretty miss, and thou shalt learn something of thy sweetheart.'

"Agitated by conflicting fears, the credulous girl entered the wretched cottage. The door was closed against chance intruders, and for about half an hour Grace was detained while certain mysterious operations were carried on. It was with a light step and a smiling face that she at length quitted the hovel, and hastened on her homeward path across the common, determined to attend to the directions of Black Sue, and visit her once a week for fresh news.

"Now all this while Stephen Kennedy had not been insensible to the ripening charms of Grace; in fact, it is probable that his unbrotherly feeling towards Mark had originated partly in jealousy, though his undemonstrative manner had never led Grace to suppose it to be the case. When, however, a considerable time had elapsed after Mark's departure, he began all of a sudden to make his feelings known to his pretty cousin.

"'Couldst thou love me, Grace?' was a question which made her start, and look up amazed from her work as she sat by his side in the inglenook one winter evening.

“‘Love thee, Cousin Stephen? Yes, I love thee well.’

“And Grace spoke the truth, for her gentle heart cherished feelings of tenderness for all with whom she was associated by ties of blood, or intimate acquaintance. But she soon discovered that a love warmer than this was coveted by Stephen, and that he was anxious for no less a privilege than to have her ride with him to fair and market, and lean on his arm in her afternoon walks on Sunday, and, after a while, to place her pretty hand in his at the altar of the old parish church, and accept him as her wedded husband. When Grace discovered this she cried bitterly, and begged Stephen never, never again to speak of such things, for that Mark would come back some day, and she had promised to be true to him till death, and meant to keep her promise.

“For some time after this Stephen was silent and sullen; but he had watched his cousin too closely not to be aware of her frequent visits to Black Sue’s cottage, and this knowledge determined him on a plan which he was not slow to put in execution. One dismal evening, when the rain and the wind rendered it improbable that Grace would venture out, a countrywoman returning from market observed Stephen issue forth from Black Sue’s door, and said to herself, ‘No doubt Farmer Kennedy has had one of his cows seized with the sickness, and has been in search of a charm, like any poor body, though he would not have it be known.’

“About Christmas-time old Richard was seized with a dangerous illness, and took to his bed, never, as it proved, to rise from it. Grace saw, as she believed, her dreams fulfilled. Sickness and death—had they not continually haunted her? Now it was to come to pass. Richard Kennedy could afford to hire attendants for his sick-bed, but his niece would not trust to paid nurses, but was a constant and patient watcher by the old man’s side, forestalling his wants, bearing with his irritability, whispering now and then words of comfort—not for this world but the next—whenever he was able to listen. To attend to this duty she had even denied herself for some time the satisfaction of a visit to Black Sue. At last one day when her uncle appeared a little better than usual she left him in the care of the nurse, and set out for a walk across the common; at once to enjoy the fresh air, so desirable after her long confinement, and to obtain news of Mark. On entering Sue’s cottage she was received by the wise woman with a dark and ominous look.

“‘Thou hast been long a coming, lass,’ she said, in a harsh tone; ‘and I have but ill news to tell thee now thou art here.’

“‘Ill news? Oh, yes, I knew he would die—my poor uncle!’

"Your uncle?—who said your uncle? I am speaking of the young man, Mark Kennedy."

"Mark—Mark—what of him?" exclaimed Grace eagerly, seizing the woman's withered arm with a convulsive clasp.

"Mark is dead. I knew it last week, but have had no chance to tell thee."

"Dead!" shrieked Grace. No, not dead—it cannot be!"

"It is so, Grace Morland. It has been revealed to me by three signs—in the fire, in the sky, and in the water."

"You are false! Your words contradict themselves! Why, then, have you told me time after time that he would come back—that I should certainly see him again? Mark—my own Mark?"

"The old woman paused a moment at a loss, perhaps, for an answer; then she said:

"Thou'lt see him again, lass—but it will be in the spirit, not in the body. Mark's body was buried in a foreign soil, but his spirit will come back to thee. I am not permitted to say how or when."

"But it *will* come, you are certain."

"Yes, so sure as yon sun will rise again to-morrow over the Lea woods Mark's ghost will appear to thee, maiden, some time between this day and the day of thy death."

"A sad change came over Grace Morland from the period of her receiving this startling news. The resumed cheerfulness to which the old woman's previous predictions had given rise was exchanged for a deeper, more settled gloom. Her days were passed in weeping, and her nights in terror. She could no longer bear to be alone or in darkness, and a shadow or a sudden sound would cause her to start, and tremble, and turn pale. In the meanwhile Stephen renewed his offers of love, and Grace clung to him with more expression of tenderness than she had ever shewn before. During her uncle's lingering illness, as she continued to watch 'the couch whence hope had flown,' the idea of marrying Stephen became less and less strange to her. Mark was dead; of that she had been solemnly assured by one in whose power and word she trusted. Stephen was strong in body and mind. In his presence she felt tolerably free from the torturing fear which elsewhere continually oppressed her. Then the idea had occurred to herself, and been hinted at by others, that if the old man should die there would be an impropriety in her remaining any longer at the farm, and she had no other home to receive her. Stephen was the only relative whom she knew or cared for.

"So, when on his death-bed, her uncle placed her hand in that of his son, and said, 'For my sake, Grace, you will love and comfort poor Stephen,' she threw her arms round the old man's neck and answered:

“‘Yes, uncle, I will try to do so, if God will help me.’

“Years had passed away, and the summer sun was shining down fierce and warm on the thatched roof of the Charter Farm, and the garden was gay with flowers, and the clusters of red and black currants were hanging in tempting profusion on the thick bushes, when a tall, pale-looking stranger, whose dark lustrous eyes appeared unnaturally large, shining above the hollow cheeks which bespoke poverty or recent illness, paused at the little entrance gate. A pretty little girl, with pensive blue eyes, and luxuriant tresses of golden hair falling over her shoulders, stood within, and was thus addressed by the stranger :—

“‘My pretty little maid, who lives in the old house here?’

“‘Stephen Kennedy, sir.’

“‘Is the old man dead?’

“‘What, grandfather, sir? Oh yes! he’s been dead this many a long year.’

“‘And who are you, then, little one?’

“‘Please, sir, I’m Stephen Kennedy’s daughter.’

“‘Stephen is married, then?’

“‘Yes, sir. Shall I call mother?’

“At that moment Grace Kennedy came forth from the house door. She wore a white sun-bonnet, but it had fallen back on her shoulders, and as with her basket in her hand she busied herself among the currant trees, whose fruit she was gathering for preserving, her form and features were distinctly visible to the careworn-looking man who stood near the gateway.

“‘Is *that* your mother, child?’

“‘Yes, sir; shall I call her?’

“‘No, no, there’s no need.’

“The man’s voice sounded wild and strange—different altogether from the tone in which he had first spoken. He turned and walked away rapidly, but before he did so threw a small coin to the child, which she picked up and carried to her mother, saying that a gentleman who was passing the gate had asked her her name, called her a pretty little maid, and given her sixpence. Grace turned it over in her hand, and examined it attentively. Some years had gone by since her marriage, and her early timidity had been in a measure overcome. Household duties—care for her husband and child—had occupied her thoughts, and helped to cure her of morbid fancies. She had listened to Stephen’s reasoning till she was almost convinced that her fears of supernatural appearances were weak and groundless. Still the sight of the small coin seemed to revive old and painful feelings. Crooked sixpences were common enough, certainly, and their being pierced was no unusual occurrence—but there was something strangely familiar in this one.

"‘I will give you another sixpence for this, my dear,’ said Grace to her daughter, and, carrying the coin into the house, she locked it up in her painted tea-caddy and returned to her household employment. Later in the evening, when it was quite dark, the family had assembled in the kitchen previous to the evening meal, when Grace remembered that she had left a basket filled with ripe raspberries in the large fruit-garden, to reach which it was necessary to pass through the orchard. She had long since conquered her fear of going out alone in the twilight; and, without mentioning on what errand she was gone, quitted the house. She had not been absent many moments when a shrill and piercing scream startled all those assembled in the kitchen.

"‘Good God! what is that?’ exclaimed Stephen, as he hastened out. But he had scarcely reached the front door before Grace rushed panting and breathless towards him, and sinking on the ground, clung to his knees.

"‘Oh, Stephen! I have seen Mark’s ghost—he is come at last!’

"‘Peace, woman! Don’t let the maidens and the child hear thee speak such folly.’

"But Grace was in no state to listen to reason now; so he carried her into the kitchen and laid her on the settle near the fireplace. Meanwhile the child stood by with a grave look of alarm and astonishment.

"‘Father,’ she said at last, ‘maybe mother has seen the tall pale man who spoke to me this morning.’

"‘A strange man, child? I will go and see if there is really any trespasser on the premises. Polly and Madge, attend to your mistress.’

"Stephen hastened through the garden, and entered the orchard: under the trees it was already extremely dark. As he reached the centre of the orchard he perceived a tall, gaunt figure, seated on the trunk of the old apple tree, which still lay prostrate as formerly, for by the desire of Grace it had not been removed. The man rose as Stephen approached, and in spite of the sallow face and sunken eyes he recognised his long-absent brother.

"‘Mark, boy,’ he said, ‘is it thyself, indeed? Grace was terrified nearly to death, for she thought she saw thy spirit!’

"‘Yes, I am returned only to be an object of terror. I’m a changed man, Stephen—a doomed man.’

"‘But where hast thou been all these years, Mark, lad?’ resumed the elder brother.

"‘In perils and dangers and battles more than I can reckon,’ replied Mark, sadly. ‘I was in the thick of the fight at Vimiera, I gained credit for rash bravery at Oporto and Talavera; I helped to repulse the enemy from the ridge of the Sierra de

Busaco ; I was among the first in the breach at Badajoz ! At Salamanca—ah ! that was a glorious victory ! I received this bullet-wound’—(he pointed to a scar on his temple)—‘and after that all seems confusion and blank *here*,’ he added, pressing both hands on his forehead with an expression of pain.

“But thou has had but a poor reward for thy services, Mark ! Why, thou seemst to have been ill-cared for and ill-clad. This is but a sorry plight for a brave fellow to be in who has been fighting the battles of his country.”

“Mark laughed bitterly.

“I am but just escaped from a French prison, brother. The living is bad enough there, and the clothes soon turn to rags. But I got clear of it at last, and come home to fetch *my wife*, Stephen.’ He grasped his brother’s arm, and his manner changed suddenly. ‘They tell me she is *thy* wife now. Is this true ? Was she false to me ?’

“She is my wife, Mark—they told thee true enough so far ; but as to being false, she was true to thee, lad, till she thought thee dead ; and I—I won her partly by deceit. I own it, brother, to my own sorrow and shame.”

“Both were silent for a few moments ; then Stephen spoke again :

“I tell thee, Mark, I forgive thee this blow.’ He raised his hand to his forehead where the mark of the wound was still visible : ‘I am a hard man, folks say, and ever found it difficult to forgive an injury ; but I have injured thee worse, maybe, poor lad.’

“Kneel down, brother.”

“Mark spoke in an imperious and solemn tone. Stephen felt compelled to obey, and knelt by the side of his brother, who was already on his knees.

“‘Here,’ continued Mark, ‘under God’s heaven, with that pure moon shining over our heads for a witness, I forgive thee and her. Let us swear an oath of eternal brotherly love.’

“The brothers’ hands were for a moment clasped together, and when Stephen rose his eyes were dimmed by unaccustomed moisture, for by Mark’s wild look he feared that all was not right with his restored brother.

“Now come in and rest and refresh thyself, lad ; the old house must be thy home again for the future.”

“Not yet—not yet,” replied Mark, resuming the tone in which he had first spoken ; ‘go back and tell Grace that it was Mark himself and not his spirit from which she fled just now. Tell her that he came back as he promised, and that he forgives her and you.’

“Yes ; it will be best to prepare her, for she was very much alarmed. Stop here till I return.”

“Mark seated himself again on the timber, and Stephen

hastened back to the house. But when he arrived there Grace was in no condition to listen to explanations. She had fainted, and the servants had carried her to bed, where they were employed in applying restoratives. Stephen remained for some moments with his insensible wife ; then he returned to seek his brother. But when he reached the orchard it was deserted ; and, though he searched garden and farmyard, and all the premises, and called loudly on the name of his brother, there was neither form nor sound. Mark Kennedy never came again to the Charter Farm.

"Grace lingered many months in a gradual decline. Nothing would convince her that what she had seen was not Mark's spirit, and his disappearing in so sudden a manner confirmed her in the belief. She died at the beginning of hay-harvest, about a year after Mark's return.

"Stephen lived to a great age, a stern, melancholy man. His daughter, it is said, remained single that she might devote herself to the task of making his declining years happy. You will have guessed, no doubt, that the prim lady who received us so courteously just now is the pretty golden-haired girl who spoke with Mark at the little gate of the flower-garden. She treasures the crooked sixpence, I am told, as a remembrance of her dead mother, and has not given up all hopes of Uncle Mark's return ; so she keeps a room ready for him, and waits prepared to attend upon him, and comfort him, as she did her beloved father. Poor old lady ! I believe she finds her chief pleasure in that hope."

My friend paused, and I thanked him for his long and sad story ; and when we reached the village I could not help turning out of my way to visit a lonely corner of the churchyard, to which I had been directed by him, and read the inscription on a simple headstone which marks the spot where rest the mortal remains of "Grace Kennedy, wife of Stephen Kennedy, yeoman, of this parish, who died June 15th, 18—, aged twenty-nine."

My peace I leave with thee,  
My peace to thee I give ;  
Take up thy cross and follow Me,  
And thou with Me shalt live.



# GREENWARREN:

A TALE OF THE TIME OF BAMPFYLDE MOORE CAREW.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### THE NIGHT TRAVELLER.

The waggon stood at the inn door. It was a heavy, lumbering vehicle covered with tarpaulin, down the sides of which sundry little streams came slowly trickling as the pattering sleet fell thick and fast on the roof, and melted gradually away into dirty water. The ostler was engaged in attending to the horse, a strong, bony animal, yet scarcely strong enough, it appeared, for the weighty load which twice during every week he was compelled to drag between the little country town and Gloucester. The driver and owner of the vehicle was standing by the cheerful fire in the bar, chatting with the fat landlady, and regaling himself with his accustomed glass of hot brandy and water. It was mostly goods of various descriptions which Silas Hodge was accustomed to convey in his ponderous waggon ; but now and then he had the chance of a stray passenger who preferred the slow tedious conveyance to the fleetier and more aristocratic coach which ran between the little town and Gloucester weekly, as more suitable to his station or his pocket. The day, however, had been cold and wet, from the early hour when Silas quitted his small roadside cottage home to that in which he arrived at the Green Griffin, about four miles from Gloucester ; and it was not likely that any person would travel at all, least of all by Hodge's waggon, in such weather, unless compelled by necessity. The vehicle only contained some large boxes and heavy iron rods, and owing to the state of the roads the journey had occupied a longer space of time than usual.

Exactly as Silas Hodge put down his heavy tumbler on the bar-table, and resuming his broad-brimmed hat, which had weathered as many storms as a veteran sailor, took out his

leather purse to extract from it the required coin, a tall, shivering figure, ragged, and wan, and drenched with rain, stole up to the inn door. Timid and shy she seemed, as if such as she had scarcely a right to look upon a cheerful light and warm fire, and to listen to the sound of merry jovial voices, for she stood by the open door, looking into the lighted passage, as if hesitating whether to enter or not.

"Hallo ! wench," said the ostler, "what do you want here this time o' night ? The missus don't lodge vagrants, I can tell ye."

"I'm on my way to Gloucester, and its far to walk, this rough weather. I thought I might get a lift in the waggon here."

"Mr. Hodge be just a going off, and you'll find him there in the bar yonder. You'd best be quick about it." The woman looked down at her soaked, ragged garments, as if doubtful whether she might venture to intrude herself into the clean house ; then she appeared to summon courage, and, wrapping her shabby cloak more carefully round a great bundle which she carried close to her bosom, she walked on towards the bar door.

"Goodness gracious ! whatever's that ?" exclaimed the buxom landlady, staring at the unexpected guest as she stood in the doorway, and peered into the comfortable room with hollow, dark eyes, which had a wild, wolfish expression.

"Why it ba'n't nothing but a tramp, and you needn't go for to frighten yourself, my dear," said the waggoner, taking advantage of the momentary alarm, to be unusually affectionate.

"Well, bless me, Mr. Hodge, but it did give me a turn to see the poor, wandering thing a standing there all of a sudden. I thought, sure, it were a ghost ! I declare it do make one all of a creeping shiver."

"Take a teaspoonful of rum, neat—only a teaspoonful—there's nothing like a drop of rum, neat, when one's anyways flustered," replied Hodge, giving the fat widow a pat on the back by way of a reviver ; "and I must e'en bid you good night, mistress, for I'm blest if it ba'n't nigh upon nine o'clock, and Daisy and I have a good five mile further."

"If you please, sir——" began the stranger in the winning tone usually assumed by mendicants, intercepting his way.

"Make room, missus, will ye ? My stars ! if you ba'n't an object to behold, neither ! Here, stop a bit ; I don't mind if I treat ye to a mug of warm ale to keep the cold out."

"Many thanks to your honour—and can you give me a lift, sir, as far as Gloucester, for I am weary and footsore ?"

"A lift in the waggon !—yes, with all my heart. You didn't ought to be abroad to-night ; it ba'n't weather for a dog to be out in. There—drink your ale, and stir your stumps, for I've not a moment to lose."

The woman made a motion of her hand as if to decline the offered refreshment ; then, apparently changing her mind, she

took the cup which the landlady held towards her and emptied it at a draught.

"Poor soul!" said the kind-hearted dame, "its bad to be travelling on foot this weather, and at this time o' night, and with a child, too. Bless the dear babby! It must be just frozen to death."

"I keep it wrapped up as well as I can, madam," said the woman, making an attempt to unfold the shawl from about the face of the infant, as if to show it to the hostess.

"Don't uncover the pretty lamb. It's asleep, bless it—and it's best it should sleep on as long as it can. There never was a truer word than that Providence watches over them dear babbies. To think of what some of 'em suffers, and what they lives through, is enough to break the heart of a Christain woman. You didn't never ought to carry 'em about the country this fashion."

"My husband couldn't get work," answered the woman, resuming the winning tone which she had laid aside, "we have been wandering about looking for employment. Then he was took ill with the fits, and died quite sudden, and I'm trying to make my way with the child to his parish, ten miles the other side of Gloucester. I'm forced to beg my way, which is quite contrary to my inclinations, having always lived decent and respectable, until—"

"There—Mr. Hodge be a calling you, and he's got all straight in the waggon. Good night, and good luck to ye! and don't ye go on a begging, but try and keep yourself and the poor child in an honest way. There's a few pence to buy a loaf for you."

"God's blessing on you, and many thanks!" replied the woman, taking the money, and hastening to quit the house, for the waggoner was calling her in rather an impatient tone.

"A poor unfortunate hussy," said the landlady, addressing herself to a smart little niece who filled the office of barmaid. "It's the old story, I suppose. Them tramps is always a going back to their own parishes, and their husbands is always dying of fits, or fevers, or rheumatics,—leastways so they says. I'd wager that poor body never had no husband at all, and that she herself be nothing but an out-and-out beggar—she'd a bold bad look in her eyes, for all she spoke so humble; but my heart always do melt at the sight of an innocent baby, for all the world like a bit of fat bacon when one claps it on the frying-pan. That's what my poor, dear man, as is departed this life, was always reproaching me for. 'The missus is a famous hand at driving off beggars,' said he, 'but when they've a brat in their arms or dragging after their skirts, she'd give 'em the bread out of her own mouth, if need be.'"

"She was a precious ugly one, however," said Polly, shaking her pretty head, and settling her smart cap in its place; "she

didn't look over young, neither. She won't get many fellows to look at the likes of her, I should think ! ”

“ Bless you ! they soon grow to look old, these wandering hussies. I dare say she ba'n't older nor me, for all she looks so haggard and witch-like ; and the child's quite a infant from what I could see.”

“ She don't look fit to carry a babby, neither. Why, when she first came in she'd got it tucked under her arm, like a bundle of old clothes—a great awkward creature ! I wonder, aunt, as you could demean yourself to speak to her.”

Well, it's true such creatures ba'n't fit to come into honest women's houses, and all the neighbourhood will say as I holds my head as high as anybody, and never permits no liberties to be taken with me—for it's not to say that it's any harm, me being a widow, and no one to say nay, to suffer such as Silas Hodge to give me a quiet kiss—”

“ Or Mr. Simon, the miller, or the squire's bailiff,” interrupted Polly with a sly smile.

“ Nor them, neither,” replied the widow, becoming a little redder in the face than she was before ; “ seeing they is all respectable men and good customers : not that it's right in wenches of your age to be always a spying and observing of your elders. And with respect to the bailiff, it was quite dark in the passage when he went out, and it's no use for to say as you saw anything ; so it's just your fancy. I always did set myself against anything unproper and unbecoming in females, and I wouldn't have suffered that misfortunate hussy to soil my doorstep if it hadn't been for the babby—I'd have you to remember that. La ! how the snow is acoming down now ! I'm glad anyhow Silas had a second glass of grog, and that I made him put on the worsted comforter. He'll be most an icicle before he reaches Gloucester.”

“ In the meantime the cumbrous waggon was surely though slowly progressing to its journey's end ; the horse keeping up a steady, even trot down the hills and wherever the ground was level, till the creaking and shaking of the vehicle announced its entrance into the pitched streets of the ancient city of Gloucester. The female passenger, who was seated crouching down upon one of the large boxes, supporting the baby on her knees, had fallen into an uneasy sleep, and was almost thrown from her position by the sudden jerk, as the waggon, with a deafening noise, commenced its transit over the pebbles. Had the traveller been accustomed to frequent a seaside watering-place, she might have compared it to the rough motion of a bathing machine when dragged into the water. Whatever might have been her thoughts she awoke with a sudden start and something very like an oath, as the poor little baby, also awakened by the jolt, or the noise, began to cry piteously.

“ It's hungry, I'll be bound,” said she to herself as she rocked

the infant awkwardly to and fro on her knees. "What on earth am I to do with it if it screams like this all the way to London. I'm a fine hand at nursing, ha ! ha ! ha ! But here we are at last."

The waggon had stopped with another sudden jolt, and Silas Hodge, jumping down upon the muddy pavement, said in a voice by no means bland or persuasive, for the cold night ride had not sweetened his temper.

"Come along, missus ; I can't be a waiting here all night. Come along, will you ?"

The woman crept out from among the rods and boxes, and, descending in the best manner she was able, encumbered as she was with the baby, asked in tones equally surly, for, having gained her object, she had discarded the mendicant whine, what was to pay ?

"To pay ! Why its worth a groat if it's worth anything ; five good mile on such a night as this, and you're no light weight neither. A strapping fine wench you be, and no mistake—I never such a pair of long legs—never ! But I shan't think of charging the likes of you nothing. There, keep your coppers, missus ; you'll need 'em bad enough, I'll be bound, and be off with you !"

"And where are we now ?"

"Why, this be the Lower George, where I always puts up ; a mighty respectable house, and not fit for the likes of you to bide in. There's plenty of small publics and lodging-houses where you can turn in for the night if you've got the money. Good night."

As he spoke he turned his horse's head to lead it into the dirty court-yard of the inn, leaving the woman with the child standing on the wet pavement, uncertain how to proceed, and jostled every now and then by a hurrying passer-by. The street was dingy and narrow, rendered more gloomy by the projecting upper stories of the houses, and destitute of light, except where, here and there, a faint ray glimmered from the upper casement of some house whose inhabitants were late in retiring. The shops had been closed for some hours. The woman paused for a few moments ; then, as the distant clock of the cathedral chimed eleven, walked or rather strode rapidly on with her bundle in her arms, till passing the cross she reached the lower end of the Southgate-street, and turned down a narrow alley. Probably she was not wholly unacquainted with the city, and knew of some humble house of entertainment where she could recruit herself and her child at little expense, and get a few hours' sleep. On the following morning, long before the deep-toned cathedral bell tolled for the early morning service, she was steadily trudging along the road again in the direction of London.

## CHAPTER II.

---

### A STEPMOTHER.

I must now transport the reader to the old-fashioned country residence of a gentleman, Mr. Richard Armitage by name, and imagine the time to be a late hour in the evening in the autumn of the year 17—, about two years before the events took place which have been related in the first chapter. It was a stately brick mansion, formerly the property of an old county family; but in the preceding generation the owners, either through misfortune or extravagance, had been forced to cut off the entail, and the house, which for a long period of years had been tenanted by an uninterrupted line of proud but open-hearted country gentlemen, had been knocked down at last to the highest bidder, and no one cared to inquire for the descendants of those who had once held so important a place in the neighbourhood.

Mr. Armitage was the son of a London banker, who had been so successful during a long life devoted to speculative pursuits, as to be enabled to leave to his only son a large fortune, part of which he laid out on the house and lands of Greenwarren. Mr. Armitage had married young, and had been left a widower with one little girl shortly after he entered upon his property. This daughter had been educated under the care of a maiden aunt, her mother's sister, who had resided with her brother-in-law, and undertaken the charge of the child at his request. Adelaide had been the darling of her father from the time when the sound of her little footsteps pattering through the darkened rooms and her lisping voice asking in imperfect tones for her dead mother could alone arouse him from the stupor of his deep grief, during the first sad hours of widowhood, and grown up to woman's estate she was his pride and darling still. Her aunt also had been loving and indulgent, though holding the reins of discipline with a tighter hand than the fond father, and striving as far as she dared to correct the faults of the petulant, high-spirited child. But there was one person who could never see a fault in "little Miss," as she was accustomed to call her, to whom her every wish was law, and who would willingly have laid down her life for her beloved young lady, had she lived in times when such a sacrifice could have been required from her. This was Hannah Woodcock, who had been

a faithful domestic in the family for many years ; who had taken Miss Adelaide from the " month," and been her constant nurse and attendant.

Miss Armitage sat by the fire in the nursery—the room still retained its old name, though its occupant had long passed the age of childhood. She wore what the ladies of that day were pleased to designate an "Italian nightgown," and was busied in combing out the large "festoon curls" which were then extremely fashionable, pausing every now and then, and looking fixedly at the embers, as if her thoughts were intent on something both painful and important.

"Is that you, Hannah?" she said, without turning her head.

"Yes, dear lady. Did you please to want Lucy? I am but a poor hand at dressing and undressing, as you know."

"No, I shall not require Lucy's help to-night, Hannah; I had a letter from my father, this morning."

"Indeed! I hope the master is well, and that he will come back soon, for it's sad for you to be all alone so long. It is some troublesome business keeping him in London, I suppose."

"Yes, yes; business or pleasure, or both."

"I don't think, miss, any kind of pleasure would keep master long away from you; it's business, depend upon it. He'll be home soon, I hope."

"He'll be home *very* soon, Hannah."

"That's right, dear miss. Keep up a good heart, my sweet, and don't fret and give way to fancies. The roads are safer now-a-days by a deal than they were when I was a wench. One scarcely hears of murder and highway robbery now since the Black Captain, as they call him, and Thunder and Lightning Dick were taken, and suffered their deserts; and the new coach is a wonderfully safe and speedy conveyance."

"He will not come by the coach now, I imagine—no, certainly not—they will travel post, of course. Hannah, you used to talk to me when I was a little girl of what might some day possibly happen, and make me afraid I should not always be what I have hitherto been to my father—that he would in time learn to love some one else better."

"Yes, I used to tell you your nose would one day be put out of joint. Many's the night I've lain worrying myself about it, and thinking the master would be sure to get married again; for though he was very fond of the dear lady your mother, and felt her loss much, I knew such feelings don't last for ever, and men will be men, gentle and simple; and when that Miss Cox came here with her smiles, and her baskets of fruit, and her soft, hypocritical words, a dressing dolls for you, and wanting to teach you embroidery, I never would give her a civil word. Then, again, when your poor aunt died, I feared master would be at a loss for some one to keep house for him."

"But now I am old enough to do that, I should think?"

"Yes, indeed. Bless you, my dear, there's no fear of anything of that kind happening now. You are all in all to master, and he's getting up in years—that is, I mean to say he's not the same handsome, hearty young gentleman he was when your dear mother died—so don't you go and distress yourself with such fancies."

"But, Hannah, this time it is not a fancy. My father has been visiting his old friend, Sir Jonathan Richmond, and Sir Jonathan has a daughter, and this Miss Richmond, it seems, is a wit, and a beauty, and I know not what besides, and has succeeded in captivating my father's fancy and winning his affections."

"That is not true. I'd not believe it if all London were to swear it," exclaimed Hannah, in an angry tone. "He may have been deluded by a pretty face, and a winning manner, into a few silly compliments such as ladies like, but he'll never marry her, never, never, Miss Adelaide!"

"I wish you were right," said her young mistress, while a smile of peculiar meaning curled her handsome lip, "but this time you are under a false impression. My father is married to the town beauty, and he will bring her here some time during the next week."

Hannah, who had been previously standing, sank down on a chair near her mistress, and remained silent for a few moments, staring as if stupefied.

"Now, don't you say that, Miss Adelaide, for goodness sake? Master cannot be married—it's too bad news to be true."

"But it is true, Hannah, and my saying it or not matters little. To-morrow I shall have to give orders for the house to be got in readiness for the new mistress; but I would not keep it from you, Hannah, dear, even till then. Oh, I am so unhappy."

She had seated herself on the nurse's knee, and put her arms round her neck, as if she had been still a child.

"There, don't take on, my darling; if it is so, we must make the best of it, but I wish Sir Jonathan Richmond's daughter had been at the bottom of the sea before ever she came to interfere between you and the master, and I'm sure I shall not be able to be a bit civiler to her than I was to Miss Cox, or any of the rest of them. Don't take on, dear! No doubt she's a vain, stuck-up thing, and will lead the master a fine life of it; those beauties have always tempers and whims, and he will be glad to turn to his own darling daughter and love her best after all."

"Now you are hardly speaking as you should, Hannah. Since my father is really married I cannot hope to be first now,



and I do not wish it. I mean to try to like my stepmother, and I hope she will be a good wife to my father, and that he will be happy in his choice."

"That's like your dear good self, but he don't deserve it. To go and marry."—

"There—we won't talk of it any more. I'll go to bed, for there's a great deal to be thought of to-morrow. Don't say a word about it, Hannah, for I mean to announce it to the servants myself. Hannah"—she added, looking towards the door, and sinking her voice to a whisper—"I really do not think I should mind it, if I did not love Arthur so very much."

"Ah! my poor dear—that's what I've been thinking of, too, but I didn't like to speak. There's a young wife coming, and perhaps children, and you'll not be your father's heiress, as it was always supposed you would be."

"Of course not, but what of that? You don't imagine he sought me because I was Mr. Armitage's heiress, do you?"

"Not just that, for proud enough any one might be to win the love of my sweet young lady—but someone we know of—we won't mention names for fear of listeners—some one you and I know of wants money, and men will be men, gentle or simple, as I said just now, and it may make a difference."

"If I thought that he sought me from any such motive he'd soon have his dismissal from Adelaide Armitage," replied the young lady, proudly; "he should never see my face again, in spite of—what you know. But I give him credit for less mercenary feelings. Still, as you say, it must make a difference, and I feel it for his sake."

"And pity it is too, dear, that you should vex about him as you do. He ought to have come or written before now."

"He may have reasons for keeping out of the way, Hannah, of which we know nothing. But a truce to gloomy thoughts till to-morrow. When you have tucked me up and put out the light, I mean to have a good sleep before I think any more about it."

"Yes, mind you do. Don't you go lying awake worrying your poor heart out with grief about master, and fretting for some one we know; but sleep like a dear child, and God bless you. To think of master, at his years, to go and get himself into such a scrape as this! But men will be men, as I'm always a saying; and my belief is that they can be took in by a patched face and a smooth tongue as long as they're blessed with sight and hearing."

Mr. Armitage brought home his unwelcome bride, and though it is true she met with but a cold reception at first from her step-daughter, matters soon began to assume a more favourable appearance in the family. Few could have been proof against the gentle manners and kind, unselfish conduct of the

new mistress of Greenwarren, and Adelaide was not one who could long harbour feelings of envy and dislike towards one who made unremitting efforts to please her. Mrs. Armitage had glided, as it were, quietly and unostentatiously into her proper place in the household, assuming and maintaining, in her calm, dignified way, the duties and rights which properly belonged to her, and which no one could be better calculated to fulfil. She wisely avoided any marked assumption of authority over the tenderly-nurtured girl only a few years her junior, and to whom her coming had evidently been a subject of grief and disappointment. Whether her marriage with Mr. Armitage had been really one of affection, or simply an act of compliance with her father's will, was a matter no one was ever able to decide; at all events, her behaviour, both as wife and step-mother, was exemplary. Even Hannah Woodcock had been forced to acknowledge that if the master was bent on having a wife he might have made a worse choice. Still the marriage was a bitter subject to the old woman, and her manner towards her new mistress, though not actually wanting in respect, was at all times blunt and uncordial.

"I should dislike old nurse, were it not for her fidelity and attachment to you, Adelaide," Mrs. Armitage would remark sometimes to her step-daughter, "but I know she is a good, faithful creature, and I trust her heart will warm towards my little one when it arrives,"—for there was a little one expected at Greenwarren.

## CHAPTER III.

## THE FOREST DWELLERS.

It was a fine autumnal morning. Glowing tints of red, purple, and orange, mingled with various shades of green, were richly spread over the vast expanse of apparently boundless forest, rising hill above hill, the high cone of the Sugar-loaf and the blue hazy outline of the Welsh mountains appearing like fantastically-shaped clouds in the distant horizon. At intervals the fallen leaves rustled beneath the step of the graceful deer, or a pheasant flew up with a sudden whirr; but otherwise all was still and calm, as if the foot of man had never penetrated into that beautiful region. Yet from beneath that soil Phœnician, Roman, and Dane had probably in succession gathered a rich spoil in mineral treasure, and human industry was still busy in securing its inexhaustable stores of wealth. Traces of man's presence and handicraft were there also; the hollow Druidical stone, the rugged path, principally traversed by rude miners; here and there some felled timber, or a small spot of ground enclosed from the waste. But not in all parts was the forest thus deserted. In a beautiful green glade, near one of the small enclosures, a party of gipsies had taken up their station. Several low tents had been erected in a spot sheltered by a gigantic beech tree, and round these groups of swarthy men, women, and children were collected, some idle, others employed in various ways. An old woman was busy plucking some kind of poultry or game, and preparing it for the spit, or rather for the large cauldron in which she was accustomed to cook the food of the community, who were many of them as great epicures in their way as those whose tables were spread with silver and damask, for was there not venison enough in the free forest, besides goodly game of many kinds? By the entrance of one of the tents a handsome man still in the prime of life lay smoking a pipe, as if enjoying a state of complete repose. It was Bampfylde Moore Carew, the king of the gipsies. Born of a high family in Devonshire, the son of a clergyman, bred and educated as a gentleman, this extraordinary man could never be induced to forsake the mendicant community which he had joined in his boyhood, and had already undergone perilous adventures and performed wonderful feats of dexterity and cunning, sufficient to make him the idol of the gipsy tribe, and even to raise him in the estimation of many of his time to the rank of a hero. Others, of course,

with mere reason considered him in the light of a consummate imposter, though if bravery, a ready wit, and a talent for acting are qualities to claim admiration, he was not wholly undeserving of his fame. Notwithstanding his wild way of life, and his low habits, there were times when good and honourable feelings appeared over all. On the morning in question, having no important business in hand, he lay basking in the sunshine, while the females prepared his savoury meal. He was aroused, however, by a sudden outcry from some of the women, and starting up, perceived that their party had been joined by a young man whose dress and appearance bespoke him a gentleman, but who seemed to be welcomed by the tribe with joy and surprise. Bampfylde himself was not long in recognising the new comer.

"So, Wilmot, you are come to see your old friends at last? If you have a mind to join us again there's a hearty welcome for you."

"I have not made up my mind to do that at present, but I want some assistance and advice, Carew, and you are the man who can best give it."

"Your purse is empty again, I suppose, and you've made your uncle's house too hot to hold you! Take to the green woods again, my lad! You spent a merry time with us once—try it once more. The gipsy's life is a free and easy one."

"It is likely enough I shall try it again some day; but just now I have other schemes in my head. Come aside with me, will you, awhile; there's no need for all to hear, for I have important matters to speak of."

"Well," said his gipsy majesty, when he and his friend had retired a little from the rest of the party, "you want your purse filled again, no doubt; take my method of replenishing it. Personate a disabled sailor, or a poor idiot, or a ruined farmer with a suffering wife and no end of children—nothing more easy. Many a golden guinea has come into my hands that way."

"I have no talent or fancy for that part of your business, friend Bampfylde, neither would the gains satisfy my desires. The gipsy life is all very well for a little change and excitement, but I don't care to live if I can't cut a figure in the world my own way."

"You should be moderate in your desires, my friend, like me. If a man has a good bit of canvass to shelter him at night, and can dine off his haunch of venison every day, and has no one to thwart or control him, what more can he wish? But what has become of your wife, and the fortune she was to bring you?"

"That is exactly what I came to speak about," replied the young man, lowering his voice. "You helped me to get into that business, and you must help me out of it."

"What! are you tired of your little sweetheart so soon?"

Shame on you for a feeble-hearted fellow ! The girl was pretty enough to have kept you true to her for a year at least."

"Yes, the girl was well enough ; but the money was necessary to me, and I am afraid I shall be done out of it altogether."

"How so?"

"Because an heir has been born at Greenwarren. That injures my prospects considerably."

"But still I suppose the squire will give his daughter a good round sum for her portion."

"How can I be certain of that?"

"Then what do you propose to do?"

"To give up the idea of the girl and her money, and to look out in another quarter. Between you and me, I know an earl's daughter with whom I might have a very good chance, and who will have a splendid fortune."

"Give up your wife?"

"My wife! Pshaw—you and I are not boys now at Tiverton school ; we know how men of the world must regard such a marriage."

Carew folded his arms, and looked steadily in the face of his companion—

"I do not boast of being a moral man," he said, "and think it no harm to lie and deceive for the benefit of the community I have joined ; but I have sworn to obey the gipsy laws, and, as king, I am still more bound to maintain them. And I would not help you to put away your wife, if the holding out of my little finger would win you the earl's daughter and her gold."

"Pray don't disturb yourself," replied the other, with a sneer, "I need no assistance in this kind of divorce. It rests with me, I suppose, whether I take my wife or leave her, since your gipsy laws are not binding on a free Englishman."

"Then I tell you, young man, that if you dare to break your promise to that girl—if you put her away from you, and go the length of taking another wife—you shall find the gipsy laws more powerful than you imagine. Bampfylde Moore Carew will never lose sight of you till he has seen vengeance taken for the wrong done, or he will find means to prevent the wrong doing."

"Come, come, there's no need to put yourself in a passion : I've fixed on nothing yet, and only wished for your advice on the subject. You know I really love the girl, and if I married another it would be but to save myself from ruin. I have other plans in my head in which you might materially aid me, and which I will unfold to you presently ; in the meantime a hot steak for my breakfast would not be unacceptable."

"You are welcome to the best of our fare. I'll see that the women provide something savoury as soon as may be. How long since you were in Devonshire?"

"I am just come from thence with the intention of seeing her, and did not know till to-day that you were in this part of the country."

"And are the old folks at Bickleigh still alive?"

"Still alive, and well, for anything I know to the contrary."

"Ah, my heart misgives me sometimes to think of the trouble I've caused at home; but I never could make up my mind to return to the old way of life, after I once became a rover. Yet I go to see them sometimes. Last year I made my appearance as a broken down soldier, and received alms and hospitality at the Parsonage, and no one suspected who I was. I betted with my own brother Henry at a cockfight, and won half-a-crown from him, and never made myself known. By my faith I felt like the patriarch of old, and would willingly have sought a place in which to weep; and sometimes, like the prodigal, I have felt the longing come over me to go back to my father's home and sue for forgiveness—but that can never be now."

"Well, my dear Carew, all your friends are wishing you to resume your proper place in the world. A man of rank and family may be guilty of many a wild prank, but in time he will feel himself in a false position, and grow weary of a life like yours when the novelty of it is passed.

"What! Do you think I would abjure the profession I have chosen and desert my loving subjects, who have done me the honour of electing me their king? I should ill deserve the name of the father of this people were I not to make their interests completely one with my own, and through life do my best to promote them. No, my friend, if I remained true to the community and obedient to its laws while our late sovereign Clause Patch was living, I am still more bound to do so now that they look to me for advice and protection. I intend, friend Wilmot, that the name of Bampfylde Moore Carew shall be handed down to posterity as that of a just and equitable monarch, who upheld and obeyed himself the laws he enforced, and was regretted in his death as he had always been beloved in his life. But come along, man, your breakfast is ready; and I wager my old woman there has provided a *ragout* savoury enough to tempt the palate of one of your city aldermen. You must do justice to our forest fare, and by my faith you would value such luxuries—freedom, the fresh air, and wholesome food—if you had been confined for days in the hold of a ship, or had travelled miles and miles through the wilds of America, with an iron collar round your neck, expecting every hour to be recaptured, as I have done. That is what I call seeing something of life."

"But seeing it in a manner which would by no means suit me," replied Wilmot, smiling, and settling the flowing curls of his wig.

## CHAPTER IV.

---

### SORROW UPON SORROW.

The year 17— had commenced under very unfavourable auspices. The weather was unusually cold and severe ; and on New Year's Day the snow lay many inches deep round the house of Greenwarren. In the course of two or three days the bitter frost was succeeded by a thaw, which caused everything round the house to assume a more dismal appearance. Where paths had a short time previously been cut through the snow, poor folks, whose business compelled them to be abroad, had to trudge through mire and water ; and from among the thick evergreens heavy masses of snow came ever and anon tumbling down with a sudden startling sound. On the 7th of January a very bleak wind began to blow, accompanied with rain and sleet, and the family at Greenwarren, seated round the large fire of coal and turf, congratulated themselves, no doubt, on being so comfortably situated. The parson was there in addition to the family party, he having come up on some little matter of business, and willingly accepted Mr. Armitage's hospitable invitation to remain, for he liked his good neighbour's society and conversation very much, to say nothing of his table and cellar, both of which were always well supplied. Now, Dr. Rogers liked a pleasant companion and a good bottle of wine when they came in his way, though he never indulged as country gentlemen were apt to do in those days ; so he and his friend sat up for some hours after the ladies had retired. At last he rose reluctantly, and wrapping round him the large cloak which had served for many years to protect him from the inclemency of the weather, walked to the window to take an observation of the nature of the night.

"The wind is blowing 'unco cauld,' as they say in Scotland, and it is dark as Erebus. I'm loth to leave your warm fire-side, squire ; but delay won't mend matters."

"The moon's young yet—it's a dismal night to be out in. Take care, parson, how you pass the old quarry by the Witch's Oak ; a man might as easily lose his life there as Farmer Morris's brown cow did last winter."

"No fear, no fear, squire ; I'm used to the road, whether I travel it on foot or on horseback. Though the night's dark, it

is not snowing now ; that something to be thankful for. Don't stand in the draught, squire—good night—mind your candle !”

The cold blast, entering through the half-opened hall door, had nearly extinguished the light. Mr. Armitage held it on one side, while he gave his friend a hearty shake of the hand.

“Good night, and I wish you a safe journey home. Bless me what is that ?”

This exclamation was caused by a sudden, shrill scream—in the darkness it sounded like something unearthly—which was heard by both gentlemen.

“Where did that noise come from, parson ?”

“From the direction of the kennels, I should think. The dogs are awake, though there is no moon to howl at.”

“It did not sound like a dog, and I thought it proceeded from the shrubbery—there down on the left.”

The squire had placed the candle on the hall table, and stood on the gravel walk outside the house, with the clergyman.

“An owl, an owl, may be,” said the latter ; “or a cat, squire, they make a hideous noise sometimes. Don't stand in the cold or you will get the catarrh or the rheumatism, and your good lady will accuse me of being the cause. Go in and go to bed.”

“I will, I will. That noise, I confess, rather startled me. I wish we could have heard it again. Take heed, parson, as you go through the enclosure. Poachers and bad folks of all kinds choose nights like this to be abroad in.”

The master of Greenwarren turned into the house, and shut and secured the hall door with its heavy bars and bolts ; and the parson pursued his way, as quickly as the darkness and the state of the ground would permit, in the direction of the village. As he passed through the enclosure he paused for a few moments to listen ; but the ominous sound was not repeated, and he made the best of his way to his humble parsonage, passing cautiously the old stone quarry and the Witch's Oak.

“I should have thought my friend yonder had too stout a heart to be alarmed by the hooting of an owl or the screech of a cat,” he said to himself, as he found himself safely arrived at his own door. “Ah, ah ! The squire has his weak point, like all the rest of us.”

Now, in order to the better understanding of this story, it is necessary to describe some portion of the upper part of the house of Greenwarren. The wide staircase, with balustrade of oak, which consisted of two flights, conducted to a large corridor, at the further end of which was the apartment occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Armitage. On the right hand was the room which had formerly been Adelaide's nursery, but had since been appropriated to the accommodation of her little step-brother ; and in a chamber adjoining that room slept the nursemaid and child. The baby was at that time nearly twelve months old, and had



been removed from his mother's chamber at the time of his being weaned. He lay in a cradle, close to the nurse's bed, so that she could attend to him during the night, if necessary, without rising. Exactly opposite the nursery was a door covered with green baize, which opened into a long passage, conducting to the back staircase, and other sleeping rooms, and close to this door was that of Miss Armitage's apartment. Most of the servants slept in the attics, which were approached by a steep narrow staircase opening out of the passage before-named.

The morning of the 8th of January was cold and dreary, though the wind had sunk considerably. A good deal of rain had fallen at intervals during the night. The hour was still early, and the chief members of the family had not been aroused from their slumbers; only the dairymaid and the shepherd had been about some hours, and the cook had lighted the fire and was beginning to prepare the morning meal; usually a very substantial one at Greenwarren.

Tap-tap.

The summons at the door of Mr. and Mrs. Armitage's room had not been at first attended to, and the knocking was repeated more loudly.

"Who is there?" cried the squire, in the impatient tone of one who is unseasonably disturbed from his slumber.

"It's only me, sir," replied a voice, that of Rebecca, the nursemaid. "If you please I wanted to dress the baby."

"Go along with you, and dress him then, there's a good woman! What do you want here?"

"I thought madam had taken the baby, sir. La! I suppose it was Miss Adelaide, then." And the servant hastened away. But neither in that of Miss Armitage's room, nor in that of old Hannah, where she next anxiously sought him, nor yet in any room in the house, could the girl, now seriously alarmed, discover the little heir of Greenwarren. Quickly the alarm was spread, and all the inmates of the house were stirring. A misfortune so strange, so completely unaccountable, could scarcely be realised. The wretched parents hurried to the room where their darling had lately been sleeping; the impression of his tiny head on the soft pillow was still there—the bed-coverings were scarcely disarranged—but the child whom they had kissed in that very cradle a few hours before was—where? In a short time the constables and others were busy about the house; the servants were examined, and closely interrogated; but in those days the officers of the law were far less active and clever than they are at present. There was much bustle and noise; search was made in possible and impossible places, and in each place over and over again. Messengers were despatched in every direction. Every one was ready with some different

opinion or suggestion, but inquiry and search proved vain. Dr. Rogers had been one of the first persons summoned, and on his arrival Mr. Armitage drew him into the dining room and said in a low, calm voice—calmer perhaps from the very intensity of the grief he was suffering—

“Parson, this search can only end in the discovery of my son’s dead body. I am as convinced that he has been cruelly murdered as that you and I are standing here now. Bethink you of the scream we heard last night—it was the death cry of my child.”

The father’s face was deadly pale, and but for the quivering of his lips he looked more like a corpse than a living man.

“God grant it may be not as you fear! But should it be so, in time some trace of the body must be found. Till then we can still hope. Let us think. Could any person have been interested in the destruction or removal of the child? Are you aware of having any enemy?”

“God knows I have tried to live peaceably with all men; I know of no enemy; I have no reason to suppose that any one of my servants owes me a grudge. I have always been a kind master.”

“Have you lately discharged any one from your service?”

“No: not lately. I once discharged a fellow for dishonesty, but that is several years ago.”

“James Richards, the butler? I believe he is since dead. We must try to consider. Was there any person interested in the removal of the child?”

“The child! Poor innocent babe! No one’s interests have been affected by him, and everybody loved him.”

The clergyman stood awhile as if wrapped in thought. His eyes were fixed on the gloomy prospect outside the window, and there was a contraction of the brow and an expression about the mouth which implied painful perplexity.

“I can certainly think of no person likely to have an interest in getting rid of the child, unless—”

He paused abruptly.

“Of what are you thinking? There is no one.”

“Pardon me—I scarcely know what I said; such a strange event as this is enough to fill one’s brain with the wildest notions. It is of no use to puzzle and conjecture till we get something like proof.” And the parson never after that expressed an opinion, or hazarded a suggestion on the subject.

“Several hours have already been spent in this useless search, which can only have but one ending,” said the squire, in a desponding tone. “Oh! if I could but know the worst—if this agonising suspense were over! My wife, my poor wife, how will she bear it?”

All the servants of the house had from the first professed

their innocence of the affair, and expressed the utmost anxiety to be examined, in order to prove it. The person on whom suspicion seemed likely to fall was the nursemaid, as it was supposed she could hardly have been ignorant of the removal of the child had any person entered the room during the night with evil intent. Yet it was difficult to impute any wicked motive to her, as she had always appeared devoted to the child, and her grief and alarm, if assumed, were certainly cleverly acted. Then what object could she have in committing an act which would deprive her of a good situation? There were discrepancies, however, in her account of the affair which made many of her hearers doubtful. She seemed greatly overcome, and scarcely to be able to articulate, speaking all the time in a timid hesitating manner, and contradicting herself several times in some of the minor points.

"I saw the dear babe last," she said, "after he had been asleep about three hours. I had taken my supper in Mrs. Woodcock's room, and sat talking to her afterwards. Before I got into bed I looked at the child—he was sound asleep, and partly uncovered. I drew the bedclothes over him, but did not wake him to give him any food. I slept well—I am usually a good sleeper. Sometimes the child would wake and cry during the night; last night he was quite quiet. I heard nothing unusual during the night. I lay rather late, as it was a dark morning, and made haste to dress because it was late. I believe I looked into the cradle—I usually do so, but I am not certain. The curtains were drawn over the top. Sometimes the baby's face was covered over, and I might have looked in without seeing him. I do not remember whether my bedroom door was open or shut. I went downstairs in a hurry. Cook gave me some food for the child. I am accustomed to feed him before he is dressed. I did not stay five minutes in the kitchen; when I went up I looked in the cradle and found it empty. I supposed my mistress must have heard the child cry and fetched it away to her room, as she had done several times." The cook remembered having given the basin of food to Rebecca. She said as she did so, "What is the matter, lass—you look flurried?" and Rebecca had answered "Nothing's the matter, only I am a bit late, and I can't bear to be hurried." All these details were given in the presence of a neighbouring justice of peace, Dr. Rogers, and Mr. Armitage.

Miss Armitage was next examined. "I sleep," she said, "on the same floor with the nursery, and nearly opposite. On the night of the 7th I undressed my little brother; I have often done so before for my own pleasure. I laid him in the cradle, and rocked him till he went to sleep. I went to bed early, and heard no noise during the night, excepting once, when the shutting of a door startled me. I concluded it was Dr. Rogers

going away ; he often stays late. I did not leave my room during the night, and was in bed when Rebecca knocked at my door to inquire for the baby."

The young lady gave her evidence clearly and distinctly, though it was occasionally interrupted by sobs. During the whole time she had been speaking the parson kept his eyes fixed on her face with a stern, penetrating expression. The poor mother had very little to say, and could scarcely command herself sufficient to speak at all. She had seen the child last about ten o'clock, just before she retired to her room ; he was asleep, and she kissed him in his cradle. Rebecca was in the room. The father had paused at the nursery door as he went up to bed ; all was quiet, and he did not enter, for fear of disturbing the child. He last saw the child when he was brought in for a few moments by the nurse after dinner. Dr. Rogers deposed to having seen the child safe and well, in the nurse's arms, on the previous evening. The rest of the servants appeared from their own account to have slept soundly, and heard nothing. They all slept in a different part of the house, from which the long passage before mentioned formed the communication with the corridor. Old Hannah had been keeping her bed for two or three days with an attack of rheumatism, and said she had been much disturbed by the pain in her sleep for several nights ; and the doctor had given her something quieting, and she had slept better in consequence. She had not seen the baby for several days, because she had been confined to her room. There was not sufficient evidence to convict any person of any knowledge of the crime, for crime it certainly must have been, whether of murder or abduction. Every one was acquitted, though perhaps there was not a person in the house on whom suspicion did not in some manner rest. No trace of a forcible entry having been made into the house could be discovered, and any marks of footsteps outside would have been obliterated by the rain. Mr. Armitage had, as will be remembered, himself secured the front door, and every back entrance was found barred and bolted as usual. It came to be the settled opinion that the child had been murdered, and its body artfully concealed ; but how or by whom was a mystery which time, the great discloser of secrets, and the Omnipotent Power which brings bad deeds to judgment, alone could reveal. Long and careful search was made for the body. River and ponds were dragged ; but there were many ways in which it might have been disposed of less likely to be surmised. At last all search was given up as useless, and the neighbours agreed that Mr. Armitage was a heart-broken man. He seemed to have lost all taste for his former pursuits ; all interest in anything whatever. If he could have known his child's fate he thought he could have borne it better, but the uncertainty was killing him ; and the memory of the sound he had heard

on that disastrous night was ever preying on his mind. Parson Rogers, once such a cheerful companion, would now sit opposite to him by the fireside, looking in his altered face and musing gloomingly and silently.

There was a dreadful thought continually haunting the parson's mind, ever since it first flashed upon him in the dining-room at Greenwarren, on the morning of the child's disappearance. One person might certainly have an interest in his removal or destruction. Miss Armitage had been her father's darling and his heiress; the child might be considered to have interfered with her rights. Though he strove to banish this thought as one too horrible to be entertained, it would frequently return in spite of him, till at last he looked at Miss Armitage with a secret feeling of repugnance and horror, watched her closely when he could do so unobserved, and shrank from the touch of her hand.

Mrs. Armitage had borne up wonderfully under her great sorrow; probably she struggled to do so for her husband's sake; and after a time there was a new motive for striving after resignation—a new hope awakened in her bosom to impart somewhat of consolation. She was likely again to become a mother, and her crushed heart began to fill with a new love for the being yet unborn. Had her hopes arrived at fruition Mr. Armitage also might have become a happier man. At the very time when he was again expecting to be made a father a sudden shock put an end to his hopes and the life of his young wife. The skeleton of a male child had been dug in the old quarry near the Witch's Oak; the country people who made the discovery had run eagerly and opened mouthed to announce the news at Greenwarren, and the effect of the sudden fright on the poor mother made Mr. Armitage a widower again in the course of a few hours. At first it had been naturally supposed that the skeleton found was that of the missing child; but afterwards doubts began to be raised on the subject. The skeleton appeared to be that of a younger child, and to have remained in the ground for a longer period of time. Old Hannah shook her head and expressed her opinion that there were bad hussies enough in those wild parts who cared little what became of their ill-gotten offspring; and she would warrant those were none of the bones of the poor little master after all.

After the death of Mrs. Armitage no one ever spoke of the mysterious occurrence to any member of the family, and by degrees it almost ceased to be discussed by the neighbours, as other sad and exciting events began to occupy their attention. Only Dr. Rogers continued to brood over it in silence, and had quite determined in his own mind by whom or by whose connivance the crime had been committed and the motives for committing it.

## CHAPTER V.

---

### THE PARSON'S VISITOR.

Those were right who had predicted that Mr. Armitage would not long survive the loss of his child and wife. From the time of his experiencing the second heavy blow he appeared to gradually sink away, till in a very few months he was laid beside his young wife. Thus was Miss Armitage left an orphan ; friendless, almost except for the untiring devotion of the old nurse, who had resolved that death only should part her and her dear mistress. But though Adelaide may have had few faithful and attached friends in reality, it was not likely she would be without seeming ones at least, or fail to meet with much kindness and attention, for she was left undisputed mistress of Greenwarren, and of her father's large fortune. When his health just began to fail the old gentleman had made a will, by which he bequeathed all his property to his daughter.

"I have but one child," he said ; "it is right that she should inherit all I possess."

The parson and the lawyer, however, remonstrated with him on the subject, reminding him that there was no actual proof of his son's death ; the skeleton found could not be identified as his, and he might possibly be discovered some day ; and yielding to their solicitations, he made a fresh will, leaving the property to trustees for the benefit of his daughter ; but in case of the return of the son within twenty-one years from the date of his death, the whole, with the exception of two hundred per annum bequeathed to Adelaide, to revert to him.

"It is but a useless precaution," said the old man. "My son is dead ; you heard his death-cry, parson, as well as I. I shall go to him, but he will not return to me."

But was Adelaide happy as the possessor of Greenwarren ? Quite the reverse. All the rooms looked so gloomy and desolate, and during her gloomy walks in the grounds her thoughts could only dwell painfully on the past and its sad memories, on those first peaceful years of her life which had been followed by others so fraught with sorrow and anxiety ; the innocent, childish days when she was her father's sole darling and accom-

panied him in his walks and rides ; when she was petted and fondled by her kind nurse, and knew no dread of anything whatever but an occasional reproof or frown from her more severe aunt ; the pleasant time when she and her step-mother had been like two sisters ; when she caressed her little brother, carried him about the lawn, or watched his baby slumbers. But, besides dreary reminiscences of those departed dear ones, there was another bitter, anxious thought which interrupted her sleep by night and troubled her continually by day—the thought of one still living, for aught she knew to the contrary, but forgetful of her, and, alas ! unworthy, for whom she had already sacrificed much and suffered deeply. How many days she had waited to see that face and to hear that voice, still dear and ever present to her memory—how many more might she still wait in vain ? At last, when some months had elapsed after the death of Mr. Armitage, when hope was beginning to fail and patience to tire, the wished-for visitor arrived. He came and went mysteriously late in the evening, having remained about an hour in the dining-room at Greenwarren, where Miss Armitage received him in the presence of her faithful nurse.

“Where are you going now, dear miss ?” said old Hannah, on the following morning, as she met her mistress in the hall equipped to go out.

“I am going to the Parsonage, to speak to Dr. Rogers.”

“I will go with you, dear miss ; wait a moment while I get my cloak and bonnet.”

“No, Hannah, I will go alone.”

“Now there’s wilfulness, I declare ! And pardon, me my dear, I think it were better to wait till the parson came to see you. He that pretended so much friendship for the dear master so long as he could eat of his venison and drink his wine and has never set the sole of his foot in the house ever since you have been left a comfortless orphan !”

“The parson was very kind to me once—I do not know why he has changed—but I shall go to Pim, nevertheless.”

“Then do order your coach, and go like a lady.”

“I shall go on foot. The people of these parts will respect my father’s daughter as much on foot as in a carriage.” And, drawing her veil over her face, she proceeded towards the door.

As she was leaving the house Hannah followed, and laying her hand on her shoulder, said, in a low, earnest voice, “Now, my sweet miss, if it is anything about *him* who came last night, just follow your own inclinations. Don’t go to ask advice of anybody. Ask your own heart, there’s a dear ; and do it or leave it alone, just which you like. Make yourself happy, darling !”

"Maybe it does not depend upon myself to do that. I think I shall never be happy, whether, as you say, I do this or leave it alone; but you must not grieve about me, dear Hannah."

The parson was seated in his little *sanctum sanctorum* or study. Perhaps he had been writing a learned discourse to edify his parishioners on the following Sunday, for the doctor was reckoned a wonderfully fine preacher, and his sermons very hard to be understood; or it may be he had been studying the works of some clever divine in order to gather suitable ideas therefrom.

A lady visitor breaking in upon his retirement probably alarmed the good man, for when Miss Armitage was ushered in by his solitary female attendant he started from his seat with an expression of surprise and alarm rather than of courtesy. Recovering his composure, however, almost immediately, he bowed low, offered the lady the best seat his humble apartment contained, and seating himself opposite to her, said, in a polite, but constrained tone, "You are doing an old man great honour, young lady, in coming to visit him thus in his poor house—but you are right welcome."

"I am come," replied Miss Armitage, "because I could find no other opportunity of speaking to you." "If," she added, with a smile, "the old man refuses to come to the rich lady's house, she must even visit him in his poor one."

"I crave pardon," said Dr. Rogers, in a hesitating tone, "if I have failed to pay my respects to the daughter of my late lamented friend, it was from no—I mean it was not from the want of—interest about her."

"And yet since my dear father's death you have kept quite aloof from me!"

The parson paused, and took a pinch of snuff, while he appeared to be considering what reply he should make.

"I could not tell whether since the late events my society would be agreeable at Greenwarren," he said, at last.

"Oh! for shame! when I have sent you repeated messages to request your attendance, and you had always some excuse: a funeral, or a christening, or a bad cold—it was not so in my father's time. But, Dr. Rogers, in spite of all this—to which, by the way, I had no intention of alluding—I have ventured to hope that you would not refuse a word of kind counsel to the daughter of your old friend in an affair of anxious moment."

Adelaide was looking down on the ground, and her voice as she spoke the last sentence was timid and faltering.

"My dear young lady," said the parson, in a softer tone, taking her hand, "if my advice can be of any service to you, or if there is anything I can do to relieve your mind of any anxiety, I shall feel the utmost satisfaction in acting your friend."



"I felt convinced you would be kind, and I have indeed no other friend on whose discretion I could rely. Mine is a desolate position, Dr. Rogers."

"True! true! Your afflictions have been very great: and yet how many would think themselves happy in possessing such a noble fortune as yours!"

"To me it brings no happiness."

The parson's brow contracted, and that peculiar look came over his face with which he had been accustomed at times to regard Adelaide.

"Money does not always bring happiness; you have found it so, no doubt. But what is the present business about which you wished to consult me?"

"About my marriage."

"With Mr. Wilmot?"

"Yes: with him, of course. You could not think I was speaking of any other?"

"Why not? Ladies are not always constant to their first attachments; and I thought that in submission to the will of your late father you had given up your engagement to that young gentleman."

"I never gave up my engagement. In accordance with my dear father's wish I consented to postpone the marriage: he wished me to wait till Wilmot should become a more steady character."

"And now I suppose this gay gallant has come forward again—now that you are mistress of Greenwarren?"

"I see that you impute to him selfish and mercenary views—but perhaps, sir, you are not judging fairly."

"Far be it from me to impute to him any such motives! I acknowledge the charms of the fair lady before me to be sufficient in themselves to attract and retain the admiration of one of our sex."

"I do not wish for compliments," replied Adelaide in a vexed tone. "Granted that Wilmot is desirous of obtaining my fortune, and supposing also that he loves me and that I love him, what should hinder our marriage?"

"Nothing, Miss Armitage, unless a daughter's feelings of duty should incline her to comply with her dead father's wish; and if you solicit my advice about it I can only say as Mr. Armitage said, 'Wait till you shall have proved the young man to be quite worthy of you.'"

Miss Armitage remained for some moments silent, then she said: "This was not all I had to say. I wished to confess to you, sir, an act of which I have been guilty, the remembrance of which has been a continual reproach and anxiety to my mind."

"I refuse to hear it—I refuse to hear it!" said the parson, starting up. "If you have any guilty secrets—and sorrow and shame it would be for one of your sex and age to have any such—keep them to yourself; lay your sins before God, and seek His forgiveness. I am not your father confessor."

Miss Armitage regarded the old man with an expression of extreme surprise and something of haughtiness.

"You construe my words strangely," she replied. "The act I am going to confess was one of folly and rashness—nay, worse. It was a wrong act, I allow, but not so terrible a crime as you appear from your excited manner to imagine."

The parson wiped his flushed face with his handkerchief, re-adjusted his wig, took another pinch of snuff, and resumed his seat.

"Speak on, young lady," he said, looking fixedly at his visitor as she sat opposite to him, the light from the diamond-paned casement window falling directly on her face, so that he could carefully mark every varying expression of her countenance.

## CHAPTER VI.



### THE KING OF THE GIPSIES.

"I must first, Dr. Rogers," said Miss Armitage, perceiving that the parson was prepared to listen attentively to her tale ; "I must first speak of my early girlhood, and the manner in which I became acquainted with Mr. Wilmot. You have heard, no doubt, that he was educated at Tiverton School, where he formed an intimate acquaintance with Mr. Bampfylde Moore Carew, although the latter was several years his senior. You remember also hearing of the circumstance of several of the Tiverton scholars, headed by Mr. Carew, hunting and killing a deer belonging to Colonel Nutcombe, of Clayhanger, doing much damage to several fields of ripe corn. Fearing severe punishment, the ringleaders, among whom were Mr. Carew and Mr. Wilmot, absented themselves from school, and falling in by chance with a party of gipsies were persuaded to join their company. I believe all these young men, with the exception of Mr. Carew, quitted that roving mode of life after a time, and returned to their homes. There is a connection between our family and that of Mr. Wilmot, my great uncle having married a daughter of Squire Wilmot, of the Grange ; and my father, chancing to fall in with young Arthur Wilmot while on a journey of business into Devonshire, used the most earnest persuasions to induce him to quit the gipsy community. Finding the young man by no means unwilling to do so, but fearful of returning to the house of his uncle, by whom he had been brought up, and who was rather a severe guardian, my father offered him the protection of his home, while means should be tried to appease the old gentleman's anger. Arthur remained at Greenwarren for several months ; for his uncle being very highly incensed at his conduct, declared at first he would never forgive him on any terms ; but won over at length by my father's arguments and entreaties, he consented to receive his nephew again, and in case of his continued good behaviour to make him his heir."

"And if I have been rightly informed, the young man either could not or did not succeed in maintaining his uncle's favour?"

"Yes, he unfortunately relapsed for a time into his wild habits, and his uncle discarded and disinherited him in conse-

quence. Old Mr. Wilmot died not long ago and left all his property to one of his cousins. But, to return to what I was saying. While Arthur resided with us the attachment between him and myself began."

"I see ; very natural, of course. A boy and a girl thrown into each other's society ; it might have been expected."

"Well, my father at first did not discourage our intimacy, for he thought Arthur a clever, spirited young man, and relied on his promise to abjure all his wild ways. But afterwards, when he again offended his uncle, and was cast loose upon the world, and, report said, was leading a profligate life, he told me he was not worthy of my love, and begged me to think no more of him."

"And you obeyed, of course ?"

"I tried to do so ; but, Dr. Rogers, we cannot always control our thoughts ; and though I had ceased to see or hear from Arthur Wilmot, I thought of him and grieved for him still."

"What ! when you must have felt convinced he could never be a fit husband for you ?"

"Understand me, sir. I believed Wilmot's greatest, nay, his only faults, to be extravagance and the propensity for a wandering life—I believe the same still. One day old Hannah and I had been taking a walk in the grounds, and at my request we had wandered out into one of the beautiful glades of the forest. This was about a year before my father's second marriage. We had seated ourselves on the grass, and Hannah was picking the wild strawberries which grew there in abundance, and stringing them on long pieces of grass for me, for she persisted in considering me a child, and I was then only seventeen. While we were thus employed, we perceived the figure of a lame beggar, as we thought, limping along upon crutches towards us. He was dressed in rags, wore his beard long, and had an old fur cap on his head, which gave him quite a frightful appearance. I felt considerably alarmed, having no protector but Hannah, and the place being such a lonely one. The man asked alms of me, saying he was a poor fellow who had been terribly injured by a fire, and had lost all he possessed. Taking out my purse I gave him half a crown, which he received with many expressions of gratitude. Then, coming closer to me, he asked if I was the daughter of Mr. Armitage, of Greenwarren, and whether I knew one Mr. Arthur Wilmot. I was too much startled to speak, but Hannah answered for me, and asked the fellow if he could tell any news of Mr. Wilmot, for she knew I was longing to hear. Then he said that Mr. Wilmot had joined the gipsies again, and had been shot in a poaching affray ; and that he lay dying in one of the tents of the gipsy encampment about a quarter of a mile away. Grief and alarm for Wilmot overcame all my fear, and I cried out 'Oh, take me to him—let me see

him once again before he dies !—Hannah, dear Hannah !” And the man said, “I was sent here, Miss, to seek you, and show you the way, and to beg you to come before the breath is quite out of his body.” But Hannah proposed that we should first return to the lodge, and get William or the gardener to go with us. “If you delay it will be too late altogether,” said the man, “for when I came away he was very nigh gone.” “I will go at all risks then,” I said. So Hannah and I walked on together, the beggar hobbling on before at a pretty good pace considering his lameness till we came to a large open space, where the gipsies’ white tents were ranged round a large fire, and a great number of people were assembled there laughing and talking. But when we came up the lame beggar made a sign with his hand and they were all silent immediately, and stood staring at me as I followed my guide into the midst of the encampment. Then Wilmot sprang up from the ground where he had been sitting in front of the large tent, came forward to meet me, and seized both my hands. He thanked me in the warmest terms, for my kindness in coming to him, and begged my forgiveness over and over again for the deception of which he had been guilty in order to lure me thither. He was neither dying, nor had he been wounded ; but he feared my father would not admit him to his house after his falling back again to the gipsy life, and could devise no other means of bringing about an interview. I felt very angry at first, and would have returned immediately, but he held my hand fast and pleaded his cause so warmly and earnestly, telling me his uncle had been harsh and exacting, and speaking with such enthusiasm of the gipsy life, that I could not but listen. The beggar, meanwhile had disappeared within the tent, and now made his appearance again, differently dressed, and without beard or crutches. He was a tall, finely-formed man, with a handsome, open countenance, and, as he made me a graceful and courteous salutation, Wilmot introduced him to me as his friend Mr. Bampfylde Moore Carew, of whom I had heard so much.”

“I thought as much. Carew, the dog-stealer, ratcatcher, and returned convict ! And what said Mr. Carew.”

“He apologised in a very humble manner for the part he had acted ; but informed me that stratagems of all kinds were fair in love as in war ; and that it was deemed honourable in the community to which he belonged to be an adept in artifices of this kind. That the late king, Clause Patch, whom he had the honour to succeed, had asserted with his dying breath that rules for practising on the feelings and credulity of men were a more valuable legacy than stores of gold and silver. I remember his words as clearly as if they had been spoken yesterday. “In this case, my dear young lady,” he said, “you will, I trust, look upon my conduct in a favourable light, and consider me deserving your

pardon, since I have not led you into any disgrace or danger, but only to the arms of one of the finest young gentlemen in the United Kingdom.' I remained for some time conversing with Wilmot while Mr. Carew made himself very agreeable to Hannah; and she was so charmed with the gentlemanly and amiable manners of the king of the gipsies, and his great wisdom in revealing to her many passages of her past life and fortelling much good fortune in store for her in the future, that she expressed no anxiety to depart. I loved Wilmot at that time with a warmth which our long separation had tended rather to increase than to cool, and he found little difficulty in persuading me to promise over again, as I had often done formerly, that I would continue true to our engagement till death. Suddenly he started up—we had been seated together on a pile of matting and old harness in front of the large tent. 'Before you leave this place, my darling,' he said, 'I will bind you to me by a tie which cannot be broken!' Then he took Mr. Carew aside, and they spoke together in whispers for a short time; after which Mr. Carew came up to me. 'Will you be bound by our marriage rites?' said he. 'The ceremony is a simple one, and not recognised by any law of this land, but I feel sure that you and my friend Wilmot would both consider it binding.' I refused positively at first; but my lover and Mr. Carew used such plausible arguments, telling me that my father would easily be brought to consent to our marriage when we had already been united by the gipsy ceremony, and that we ourselves should feel so much more happy during our temporary separation in the thought that we were in reality husband and wife, and that neither under any circumstances might break that tie, that I reluctantly yielded, on condition that Mr. Wilmot should not claim me as his wife, or assume any authority or power over me till our marriage should have been duly solemnized in the church. Then, trembling and agitated, I suffered myself to be led into the midst of a circle of gipsies, which had been rapidly formed by Mr. Carew's command, and stood with my hand clasped in that of Wilmot while certain mystic words were said, wholly unintelligible to me. Afterwards he kissed my forehead and vowed in our own language to love and protect me always, and I was desired to kiss his hand in token of submission and obedience; and Mr. Carew then spoke some words in the gipsy tongue which I concluded were a blessing. When this was over Arthur kissed me again, thanked me very warmly for the great favour I had shewn him, called me his dear wife, and assured me I should never repent having so trusted him. Then, accompanied by my faithful domestic, I quitted the encampment, Wilmot and Mr. Carew escorting us some distance on the way home. I hoped that in a short time everything would be explained, and my dear father reconciled to what I had done,

and several times I was on the point of confessing my secret to him, but thought it better to wait till I should hear something from Wilmot, who had promised me again to quit his gipsy companions and resume his proper position in the world. Months passed away, and my father made that journey to London, returning, as you know, with a young wife. I felt prejudiced against my stepmother at first, but in a short time learned to like her, and should have been very happy but for the uncertainty and anxiety respecting Wilmot, and my secret preying on my mind; for I had neither seen nor heard from him since our strange marriage. I began to fear he had forgotten me, or that the change in my circumstances (for I could no longer expect to be my father's sole heiress) had altered his feelings towards me, which was a still more painful thought. At last, when I least expected him, he came to Greenwarren, and begged my father's hospitality for a few days."

"When did this happen?" asked the parson sharply.

"It was on the fourth of May, two years ago, when my father was in the deepest distress, for his poor wife had only been buried that morning. He had not heard of our trouble he said, or he would not have intruded upon us in so ill-timed a manner. He was well-dressed, rode a fine horse, and appeared to be in good circumstances. He came to renew his addresses to me. My father would not listen to his suit, and declined even to see him. He had been deprived of wife and child, he said, in a cruel manner, and could not part with the only comfort he had left, to one whom he did not consider likely truly to value her. Arthur attributed his long absence and silence to unwillingness to enforce his claims upon me until he could do so in an open and honourable manner, and should be thoroughly reinstated in his uncle's favour. He was anxious that I should at once make our secret known, but I was too much distressed on my father's account to think of opposing his will in any way at such a time, or of making any confession likely to grieve or displease him, I therefore begged Arthur to go away again, promising to remain all my life true to my solemn engagement to him, and to fulfil it whenever an opportunity should occur for doing so. Well, Dr. Rogers, I lost sight of him again till yesterday, when he arrived unexpectedly, late in the evening, to claim from me the promise repeatedly given, and cemented by ties which he at least professes to consider sacred. Am I not bound by all laws of honour and conscience to ratify our compact in the church?"

The parson had been applying to his snuff-box so frequently that its contents were exhausted; but, by force of habit, he continued to take imaginary pinches between his finger and thumb, and to raise them to his nose, while his countenance expressed considerable distress and perplexity.

"My dear Miss Armitage," he replied, "as that dog-stealing

fellow Carew himself, it appears, told you, I do not imagine the laws would in any way uphold such an irregular marriage ; therefore you are, in fact, a free agent. Nevertheless, as you say, the laws of truth and honour would seem to dictate that the engagement should be fulfilled. If, however, you now feel any repugnance to perform your promise to this young gentleman, I hold that you are at liberty to withdraw therefrom ; always considering that it were better to break a vow rashly and inconsiderately made than to risk the whole happiness of your life by a marriage with one unworthy."

"But, Dr. Rogers, even if he were, as you imagine, unworthy, how could I renounce him now that he has been disinherited by his uncle ? Would it not appear mean and base ? Besides, I am convinced that, had my dear father lived to know all"—she was struggling to command her feelings, but her voice trembled with emotion, and her beautiful eyes were fast filling with tears—"had he lived he would have forgiven Wilmot and sanctioned our marriage."

"If such be your opinion," replied the parson, taking another imaginary pinch of snuff, and having recourse to his handkerchief, "and if your own feelings incline that way, marry the young man at once, provided there is no legal impediment, and all be done openly and as it should be. He comes of a good and worthy family, and out of love and respect for you will, I trust, depart from every evil course, and become all you could wish him."

"And you will yourself perform the ceremony ? I wish it to take place in as quiet and private a manner as possible."

"That will I, my dear young lady, and with heart-felt pleasure if it be for your true welfare and happiness—you will have an old man's prayers and his blessing. Thank God !" he murmured as he closed the door on his departing guest—"thank God she had no worst secret to reveal to me."



## CHAPTER VII.

### PRETTY BILLY.

Adelaide was not long in discovering that if she had not been happy as the solitary mistress of Greenwarren, she was not likely to be more so when united to him whom she had loved "not too wisely, but too well." Partial as she had always been to Wilmot, she had even before marriage had reason to fear that his habits were not such as would be likely to render him a good husband ; and, as daily intercourse and familiarity enabled her to judge more truly of his character, she acknowledged to herself with vain and bitter regret that he was indeed unworthy of the love she had bestowed upon him. Having secured the prize at which he long aimed—Adelaide and her fortune—he entirely threw off the mask, and suffered himself to appear to his disappointed wife what he really was—a man wholly without principle, a selfish seeker of pleasure, who had no desire beyond gratifying the passing wish of the hour. At times he would deceive her by some display of affection, re-kindling the fading spark of her love, and leading her to hope that he might in time be won by the tender tie of domestic affection ; but these hopes were continually chilled by a fresh relapse into dissipation. Adelaide spent the greater part of her time in solitude in the dreary old house, for her husband could never be satisfied for any length of time in one place, and for the most part she was left wholly in ignorance of his movements. At one time in London, indulging in all kinds of gaiety and extravagance—the cock-pit, the gambling-house, and similar places of entertainment being his favourite resorts ; at another he would be wandering about the country in some quaint disguise with some of his gipsy associates ; only when money failed did he return to Greenwarren.

In consequence of the advice and urgent desire of Parson Rogers, the property, as I have said, had been settled on Adelaide by her father's will, and she had reason to rejoice that this was the case. But as her extravagant husband contrived to get rid of the greater part of her almost princely income, she was compelled to live in the strictest retirement herself, to keep but a small establishment, and to reduce her expenses within very narrow bounds. In doing this she also followed

her own inclinations, for she was not one of those wives who plunge into an excess of wordly pleasure and gaiety, in the vain endeavour to supply that happiness which is wanting at home. She had no taste for amusements unshared by her husband, and her daily life was more like that of a desolate widow than of a young and beautiful wife. Though her eyes had been opened to her husband's unworthiness, and her feelings towards him had undergone a great change, she still continued to love him, as women will sometimes love in spite of indifference and unkindness, and his visits were always anxiously desired, although in reality they but added to her anxieties. These visits were generally unexpected and brief, for as Wilmot was not like his friend Carew, a lover of field sports, the neighbourhood of Greenwarren presented few charms for him. He soon grew weary of Adelaide's grave face and dejected manner, and was anxious to return to more exciting scenes as soon as his purse was filled. Dr. Rogers no longer absented himself from Greenwarren, but frequently occupied his corner by the fireside as he had done in the Squire's lifetime; he seemed to have renewed his kind feelings towards Adelaide, and his visits, which were usually paid in her husband's absence, were always welcome to her. But a time had come when another trouble was to befall the young mistress of Greenwarren: the death of her attached nurse, Hannah Woodcock. This faithful servant had felt with a keen anguish—the keener because remorse for past misdeeds was mingled with it—that she had failed in securing to her beloved mistress the happiness she had been so desirous to promote. She had fostered her attachment to Wilmot exactly as she had encouraged her every fancy and whim as a child; her one aim had been to give her darling pleasure, and she had not the wisdom to perceive that in gratifying the wish of the moment she might be preparing misery for years. Wilmot had also managed to gain an ascendancy over the woman, because he found it in his interest to do so. Bribes she was proof against, but the winning manner he so well knew how to assume, and his professed devotion to Adelaide, had succeeded in attaching her to his interests. Now, like her mistress, she had been undeceived; Adelaide was miserable with all her riches, she had neither pleasure nor comfort in life—and Hannah from her inmost heart hated him who had blighted her nursling's fair prospects. Trouble preying on the old woman's mind, more, perhaps, than the weight of years, had brought on the disease which terminated her life. In parting from her affectionate nurse Mrs. Wilmot seemed to have lost the last link that bound her to the past, almost her only earthly friend. She mourned for her very bitterly, and watched by her bedside for several nights before her death. What was revealed during those long and

dreary hours, while the young mourner was waiting in awful expectation the departure of the struggling spirit, will be shewn in due time.

After Hannah's death Mrs. Wilmot's life became still more desolate and dreary. She had no congenial companions, few amusements of any kind to interest her, and everything at Greenwarren so painfully reminded her of past times, that she would gladly have exchanged that noble house for the poorest labourer's cottage, if by doing so she could have escaped from her own gloomy and terrible fancies. Though the nursery had always been kept closed since the fatal night of the young heir's supposed murder, the image of that baby-brother and the uncertainty respecting his fate were perpetually haunting her, and she had no child of her own to awaken new and tender affection.

Parson Rogers was not very much surprised, though he elevated his eyebrows and inwardly pronounced it a wild scheme, when Mrs. Wilmot informed him that she was become altogether weary of the lonely life she led during her husband's frequent absence, and felt such a longing for some object on which to bestow her love, that she had determined to adopt a little foundling. If such were indeed her intention, the Parson said, and she thought it would meet with no opposition from Mr. Wilmot, there were many destitute children in the parish who would be suitable objects for such charity. But Mrs. Wilmot was inflexible in her determination not to choose her *protégé* from the neighbourhood of Greenwarren ; she had determined to take a child from the Foundling Hospital in London.

Adelaide had never been in the great city, and the journey was to her imagination a very formidable one, but she made up her mind to undertake it under the escort of a faithful, elderly manservant ; and decided on doing so during her husband's absence, fearing probably his disapproval of her scheme.

Much respect was shown by the governor and matron of the Foundling Hospital to the pale, elegant lady, who came to the establishment with the expressed intention of adopting one of the children. She announced herself as a lady of fortune, who had the misfortune to be childless, and proceeded to make very particular inquiries concerning the little inmates of the hospital.

"There will be no difficulty, I conclude," she said, addressing herself to the matron, "in obtaining permission to remove a child?"

"Not the slightest, madam," answered the latter, "provided you make yourself responsible for its proper maintenance, which," she added with a curtsy, "a lady of your quality can of course do."

"May I see the children at once?"

"You can go through the wards with me, and if I might

make so bold as to advise your ladyship, I should recommend you to choose a young infant—you will be able to train it your own way.”

“No ; I want a child of four years old, neither more nor less than four, or he will not suit me ?”

“A boy, madam ?”

“A boy, certainly : and it is essential that he have a fair complexion, and light curling hair, with eyes of a dark grey or blue colour.”

“If you are so very particular, madam, there may be difficulty about suiting you. We have fair boys and dark, for the matter of that, but as to the hair, why, as that’s cropped close according to the rules, one can’t judge so well about curliness.”

“Let me see all the children of about the age I have named, and I will try to make my selection. I suppose you can form a pretty good estimate of their ages ?”

“Why, yes : we can’t be very far wrong about that. They are generally left here very young—a few days or a week old, or from that to a month—but many die soon after admission. If they are several months old it is not so easy to judge, but I think the calculations are generally pretty accurate.”

The lady appeared considerably agitated as she examined one after another the little candidates who were submitted to her inspection. Some she passed over at once with merely a glance at their features ; about others she lingered, and hesitated, but rejected them with a sigh. At last she fixed upon a blue-eyed, bright-haired little fellow, and, placing him on her lap, asked him a few simple questions, in a gentle, kind tone. The boy smiled up in her face, and answered readily.

“I think I have choosen this one,” said Mrs. Wilmot with emotion ; “but before I decide I must ask you several questions concerning him. Be so kind as to give me all the information possible. What is his name ?”

“A hundred and twenty two, your ladyship, that’s his number in the books, but he’s a kind of favourite here, and we call him Pretty Billy.”

“Under what circumstances did he arrive here, and what was his age when brought ?”

“It’s all down in the books, madam, and you can learn all about it there. I cannot take upon me to remember any facts concerning either of the children, the number is so great. Oh, my lady, there is a great deal of sin to answer for somewhere or other, when houses like this come to be required in a Christian land !” The particulars gained by Adelaide from the books of the institution were as follows :—

On a certain Saturday night in January, 17—, the bell having been rung violently, the porter opened the door and

found a respectable looking woman outside, with a basket upon her arm. She called his attention to a bundle lying on the steps, and on raising it he found it to contain a male child of apparently about twelve months old. The woman gave her name as Mrs. Sally Davis, a widow residing at No. 3, King-street, Covent-Garden. She had been out doing her marketing, she said, and passing along the street, there being few passengers owing to the severity of the weather, had been overtaken by a tall, wan-looking-female, dressed in rags, and carrying a bundle in her arms. As she passed the Foundling Hospital she placed the bundle on the steps and ran away. Mrs. Davis quickened her pace, and as she arrived at the steps saw the woman disappear round the corner. She stooped to look at the bundle, and fancied she heard a stifled cry. Then she rang the bell. The woman was carefully examined, to discover whether she had spoken the truth, or if in reality she were aware of the child's parentage; but she adhered to every particular of her tale, however closely questioned. Nevertheless, suspicion continued to rest upon her, as she took an evident interest in the child, frequently visited him, and brought him trifling presents. The clothes worn by the child on his arrival at the hospital, which were of fine and costly materials, and the old shawl in which he had been wrapped, were submitted to Adelaide's inspection, and having examined them and listened to all the particulars above related, she expressed herself satisfied. The necessary forms were gone through, and the little boy was placed under the care of his new guardian, the clothes and shawl being also delivered to her. But before leaving London Mrs. Wilmot determined to ascertain, if possible, whether the officers of the Foundling Hospital were correct in supposing that Mrs. Sally Davis knew more about the child than she had chosen to acknowledge, and whether she were indeed the person she represented herself to be.

She called on the old lady at her residence, No. 3, King-street, Covent Garden, and received from her own lips an exact account of the whole affair, varying in no material respect from that which she had already heard. Good Mrs. Davis said she had felt her heart warm towards Pretty Billy as soon as she heard the little forlorn thing utter his feeble cry on the steps of the hospital; and when he was taken near the fire, and had some food given to him, she should never forget the sweet smiling face of the innocent baby, just for all the world like her own precious Samuel who was an angel in heaven. He looked pale and ill, and she thought he would soon be an angel too, but the child was only suffering from cold and hunger, and the Lord had seen fit to spare him to grow a strong, fine little lad. She would always have continued his friend in her small way; but what could a poor widow do, depending on the profits of a little

chandler's shop, except to take him a cake or an apple sometimes, or to have him out on a holiday? She thanked God he had met with a more able protector in the lady.

Could Mrs. Davis describe more particularly the appearance of the woman by whom the baby had been left? No: for she brushed by her very hastily. It was moonlight, and she just glanced at her face. She remarked only that she was very tall and mean looking, and had a clumsy, awkward appearance. Adelaide was forced to be content with this information, and having supplied her adopted son with everything that was necessary for the new station he was about to fill, set off once more to her home at Greenwarren.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### ANOTHER DISAPPEARANCE.

How the heart of Adelaide Wilmot seemed to yearn towards that child ! How tenderly she kissed him over and over again in the carriage during the journey home—how often she gazed earnestly in his face, and smoothed his short golden curls, and shed tears as she did so ! And how soon did the little fellow overcome every feeling of shyness, and cling lovingly to the first mother he had ever known, and delight her with his childish caresses ! Billy soon became as great a favourite with everyone at Greenwarren as he had been with old Mrs. Davis and the matron of the hospital. He was a lovely, engaging child, and the universal opinion was that Mrs. Wilmot had shewn great taste in making her selection. It remained to be proved, however, whether Mr. Wilmot would be equally pleased with this new addition to the family ; and there was every reason to suppose he would not. When at last he returned, after an absence of some months, he expressed the utmost displeasure at what he pronounced to be a weak, womanish fancy in his wife. What need had she to encumber herself with a child whose maintenance must entail considerable expense, and who would probably grow up to be a source of trouble and anxiety ? But, submissive as Adelaide usually was to her husband, on this point she determined to have her own way ; and as she had the entire command of her property Mr. Wilmot felt himself compelled to yield. But Pretty Billy continued to be a subject of frequent altercation between him and his wife ; or, rather, of reproach and invective on his side, and quiet persisting on hers.

Two years passed away, and the child appeared to be daily winning a stronger hold on the affections of Adelaide ; she fulfilled in every respect the part of a mother towards him, and had he been indeed her own son, could scarcely have loved him better. As her affections became gradually estranged from her husband, the more her heart yearned towards the new claimant for her love. Not that she had entirely ceased to care for Wilmot : the dying fire struggling in her breast needed but a breath of kindness to fan it once more into a flame ; and, as will appear by the sequel, her heart shrank from any act which would injure his interests, even though duty required its performance from her.

One evening in early spring Mrs. Wilmot sat by the fire-side in the nursery, as we have described her seated once before. The room had been re-opened since the arrival of the little boy, and use and habit seemed to have obliterated the painful

impressions connected with that part of the house. Pretty Billy knelt at the feet of his mother, as he had been taught to call her, and as he spoke the simple words, with his little hands clasped and his eyes fixed on Adelaide's face, Wilmot entered the room. He had lately returned from Newmarket, where he had lost a considerable sum, which accounted for his presence at Greenwarren.

"Send the brat to bed!" he said in an irritable tone. "Is he always to be in my way?"

Adelaide kissed the child, and led him to the door of the inner room, where his nurse awaited him.

"I do not think he is often in your way, Arthur," she said, as she returned to her seat.

"I tell you he is, and will always be. I am much indebted, Mrs. Wilmot, to your wisdom and consideration in bringing him here!"

"Arthur, I had no child of my own, and I had need of something to love me."

"A wife should need no love but that of her husband."

"If you were always with me I might need no one else, perhaps; but I am so often alone."

"You cannot expect me to bury myself always at Greenwarren, and I suppose you have no fancy to wandering about the country with me? But seriously, Adelaide, what are your intentions concerning this boy?"

"I mean to bring him up and educate him as a gentleman, as my—if he were my own child."

"And have you thought about his future prospects—what is to become of him after he grows up? A pretty expense he will be to us!"

"I do not regard the expense."

"The more fool you, to saddle yourself with a base-born brat who has no claim on you whatever."

"I do not believe he is base-born. The clothes he wore would prove him at least to be the son of affluent parents."

"The clothes," exclaimed Wilmot sharply, "you never shewed me the clothes."

"You shall see them then," replied Adelaide; and taking a bunch of keys from her pocket she opened one of the drawers of a large wardrobe, and produced a bundle of fine linen, wrapped up in a faded red shawl. One by one she unfolded the different articles and laid them on the table. Wilmot pushed aside the clothes, lifted the corner of the shawl, and appeared to be examining it.

"Lock them up again, for heaven's sake!" he said, fiercely.

"Lock them up, and never let them be seen!"

"Do you know them?" said Adelaide, fixing her eyes on his face, and speaking each word slowly and with emphasis.



"How should I?" he replied. "Put them away, I say; we will talk no more on the subject."

But Wilmot's pale cheek and excited manner had revealed a secret to Adelaide. She folded the clothes carefully up, and laid them again in the drawer in silence, but she needed not to be informed that her husband had some knowledge, or at least suspicion, concerning the child. Wilmot also had made a discovery extremely annoying to him, or rather he had some unpleasant doubts confirmed.

Soon after the scene just described he again quitted Greenwarren, leaving Adelaide to the quiet enjoyment of her favourite pursuits, and the society of her darling. No longer did the days of her husband's absence appear long and tedious to her: she had much to occupy her thoughts and her hands in the care of little Billy; his instruction, his amusement, even the ordering and making his clothes, were so many objects of pleasure and interest to her. But it appeared as if Adelaide Wilmot's happiness could never be of long duration. Trouble had succeeded trouble during her previous life, and her cup of sorrow was not yet full. A heavy punishment was in store for an act of injustice committed by her in keeping a guilty secret which should have been revealed.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Pretty Billy—Pretty Billy!"

The voice was low and sweet, and came from among the shrubs on the other side of the palings.

"Who is it?" said the child, climbing up the fence and looking over.

"Rachel Scott—poor Rachel Scott, as good Mrs. Wilmot gave the petticoat to yesterday. Did'nt I tell thee I'd find thee a nice bird's nest, my sweet little lad? I've found such a beauty—four of the prettiest little green eggs ever you saw."

"Where—where?" exclaimed the boy eagerly.

"There, in the wood yonder, a little way off. I thought as thee'd like to take it thyself, or I'd have brought it to thee. Let me help thee over the fence, my darling—there's a brave boy."

"I can get over," said Billy, declining the woman's aid, and getting over the palings with a boy's eagerness, making the more haste, perhaps, for fear his nurse should come up and forbid him to go. But the nurse had at the time no fear for the safety of her little charge. She was sitting with the gardener's wife, watching her spin, and listening to some long tale of village gossip. So the boy leaped over the fence, and suffered himself to be conducted by his treacherous guide to one of the thickest parts of the forest. If Pretty Billy said his prayers at all that night, it was not kneeling at Adelaide Wilmot's feet and looking up into her kind eyes, but lying on the hard ground, far from home, his eyes fixed on the cold, starry sky and only God and His angels to hear and to pity him.

## CHAPTER IX.

---

### RESTITUTION.

Slowly and steadily the hands of the great clock in the hall at Greenwarren went round and round, measuring out dull monotonous hour after hour, and day after day ; the moon patiently fulfilled her quarters over and over again, and weary months lengthened out into wearier years. Year after year passed by, each seeming sadder and longer than the last, for they brought no hope and no consolation to Adelaide Wilmot. She could not have told when first her hair began to be streaked with grey ; when those lines, now so deeply marked, had begun to appear under her dark eyes, and about her handsome mouth ; or when she first began to lose her fresh youthful colour. Time had done something towards the great change—grief and disappointment had effected still more. It seemed to her as if she had always been old, and withered, and grey, so distant seemed the happy days of childhood and early youth ; though in reality she had scarcely passed the age when women begin to lose their bloom and beauty. It became a matter of wonder almost how she could ever have been thought beautiful. As she looked in her mirror, she would put the question sadly to herself—was this the same woman whose love had once been passionately sought, whose charms were pronounced irresistible, whose hand had been coveted by several young men of wealth and position, whom passers-by would frequently pause to look upon ? Yes, her beauty had indeed vanished, leaving very few traces behind ; yet she would scarcely have regarded the loss of so frail a possession, had she been able to preserve the far more precious treasures of happiness and love. But happiness she had never known since the loss of Pretty Billy, and her heart had now no object on which to bestow its love. Even her affection for her worthless husband was but a memory of the past, for she had been for some years a widow. Wilmot, during one of his wanderings, had been seized by a press-gang, and was drowned in a desperate attempt to make his escape from a vessel in Plymouth harbour. The manner of his death made it doubly painful to Adelaide. Had he died at home, or less suddenly ; had she sat by his death-bed, and succeeded in awakening any feelings of remorse and contrition, he might possibly have made the confession she

so ardently longed to hear. But death had for ever silenced the voice which could have revealed to her that sad secret. There was only one person living, she believed, who could afford the necessary information, and even had she been certain of his power and willingness to do so, there seemed little chance of his crossing her path again.

\* \* \* \* \*

Once more the gipsy camp was stationed in one of the green glades of the forest, on the very same spot which had been chosen by the vagrant tribe long ago ; and so little alteration could be perceived in the appearance of the place and the people, that one might have imagined it but the renewal of the scene which had taken place there years before. True, many of the stalwart men and handsome black-eyed women had then been swarthy infants hushed in their mother's arms under the tents, or creeping among the ferns and withered leaves ; but there were plenty of brown urchins to supply their place, crying, fighting, or crawling under the horses' feet, according to their advanced babyhood, while others who had passed that helpless state of existence, were shaking the ripe nuts down from the trees, or playing like so many mischievous little imps round the fire.

"Who was that pale, care-worn looking lady, handsomely dressed in black, who walked slowly and with a stately step into the very midst of the busy, noisy assembly ? She had left her horse and groom about fifty yards off under the trees, but within sight and call. As she approached, the confusion suddenly ceased : there were some among the group, it appeared, who knew her by sight—

"Hush, hush ! It is Mrs. Wilmot of Greenwarren," whispered one or two voices.

"A basket, my lady ? Buy a nice basket ?" said several of the younger girls, holding up specimens of their own handiwork.

"Let me tell the pretty lady's fortune," whined an old haggard crone. "one can see by her face she was born under a lucky star !"

"A penny, a penny, my lady, for a poor gipsy ?" cried several ragged urchins gathering round her, and holding out their little dingy hands.

Adelaide paused till there was a lull in the confusion of noises.

"Can anyone here tell me where I shall find Mr. Bampfylde Moore Carew ?"

"I am here, madam," replied the King of the gipsies, rising from his lounging position near the principal tent, and raising himself to his full height, so as to display his tall and commanding figure to advantage. He was an elderly man then, but time appeared to have dealt leniently with him, for in spite of the unsettled life he had led, his "hair-breath 'scapes," and perilous adventures, his eyes had lost little of their lustre and beauty,

and his figure was still remarkable for manly proportion and strength.

"Bampfylde Moore Carew is at your service, madam, whether you wish to consult him concerning past, present, or future ; to unravel the mysteries of your own destiny, or that of those dear to you. To inform you where hidden treasure lie ; or how to gain love, riches, or worldly honours—you have only to ask. The secrets of fate are in my hands."

"Truly, sir, I am come to question you about the past, but there is no need to talk to me in this fashion, to address me as you are accustomed to address silly fortune seekers, whom you delude into a belief of your supernatural power. You do not know me, it seems, but perhaps a second glance at my features may enable you to recognise your friend Wilmot's widow."

"Mrs. Wilmot—fair Adelaide of Greenwarren ! a thousand pardons, madam, for not having immediately recognised you ! I am indeed honoured by your condescension. Be kind enough to lay your commands on your most humble servant," he added, bowing respectfully and courteously.

"Mr. Carew, I have waited anxiously, and very long for this interview. I have sought you many times, but without success."

"Madam, I have been absent some years. I had the misfortune to be detained a considerable time in Maryland, where I was on the point, for a second time in my life, of being sold for a slave ; but succeeded in making my escape by crossing the great river Delaware on horseback. I have been a dweller for a time in the wigwams of the Indians, a sojourner in the fine city of Boston, and am but lately returned to the bosom of my faithful people."

"I heard of your return with thankfulness, because I believe, sir, it rests with you to relieve my mind of the uncertainty which has been preying on it for years, by informing me of the fate of my unhappy brother."

"Your brother, madam !"

"My brother—Cecil Henry Armitage. Do not affect ignorance of my meaning, or endeavour to deceive me by false representations. If he died, you can tell me how and when ; and should he still live, you can restore him to me."

"As I have told you, madam, I am but just returned to England, and am in ignorance therefore concerning much that may have taken place in my absence. Why do you come to me to learn news of your brother, since you profess to despise my power."

"Because as you were the chief actor in the first wicked plot you were doubtless instrumental in the second. I accuse you, Bampfylde Moore Carew, of carrying away my brother as an infant from my father's house at Greenwarren."

"Indeed, madam, you are mistaken in your supposition."

"Do not attempt to deny it. Did you not, disguised as a female, carry the child to the Foundling Hospital in London?"

"The credit of that clever performance, madam, is due to your husband alone. I have been in the habit of assuming disguises for many purposes, but I had no part whatever in carrying out that affair, though I plead guilty to the knowledge of it. Wilmot accomplished it alone, unaided in any way by me."

Adelaide's lips trembled, and her face became deadly pale.

"I feared he was engaged in the plan, but never imagined he actually put it in execution."

"You are aware, perhaps, that he had an active coadjutor in your nurse, Hannah Woodcock?"

"Yes, indeed, it was from her death-bed confession that I became acquainted partially with the truth; but, eagerly as I listened, there was little to be gained from the few incoherent words uttered in her dying agony. I ascertained that my brother had not been murdered, as had at first been supposed, but that he had been carried away, and that she believed him to have been taken to the Foundling Hospital."

"And you removed him, hence and brought him to Greenwarren? It was a mystery to Wilmot how you gained your information, but I always suspected the old woman had turned coward at last."

"Wretched woman! She committed that grievous sin for my sake, she said—for mine!—that I might inherit the property, and marry Wilmot. What folly—what wickedness!"

"She was brave and cunning, though, and managed the matter cleverly enough for a woman."

"How did she succeed in removing the child?"

"She feigned illness, I believe, to ward off suspicion, as a wily fox tries to mislead the dogs, and took an opportunity of mixing a sleeping draught with the nursemaid's ale at supper. Then she took the child out by the back door about one o'clock in the morning, and delivered him over to Wilmot in the shrubbery near the kennels. The plan had been arranged, and the night fixed on some time before. I don't know whether she administered any sleeping potion to the boy, but he well-nigh spoiled all by setting up a loud scream as Wilmot took him, and the old parson staying so late made the risk greater; but he afterwards remained as quiet as a lamb, till the jolting of the carrier's waggon entering the town of Gloucester wakened him."

"And you, Mr. Carew, were a party to that shameful transaction?"

"I was simply made acquainted with the facts, madam, after they had happened; and though the action certainly appears reprehensible when viewed in the light in which you naturally view it, I assure you that my friend gained no small degree of applause from the gipsy tribes for his bold stratagem. You

know, Mrs. Wilmot, we are professed liars and thieves, and one must not be ashamed of one's profession. There are many who fill honourable posts in the land, whose business it is also to lie and deceive, and men do not think the worst of them."

"Are you so accustomed, sir, to this absurd and improper manner of reasoning, which your conscience and your judgment must both inwardly condemn, that you cannot throw off the garment of cant and hypocrisy as easily as you discard your beggar's rags, assumed to excite charity? Try to remember for once that you had Christian parents—that you were born and bred a gentleman—and cease to trifle in a matter of such serious import. I thank you for the information you have given, though it but adds to my sorrow; but there are still more important questions to be answered—my object in coming here is not yet attained. I wish to know how my brother was a second time kidnapped, and whether he be still alive or dead?"

"Now, madam, you are speaking mysteries to me. I know nothing about the lad since you removed him from the Foundling Hospital."

"Are you speaking the truth? Is that possible?"

"Yes, by my honour as a gentleman, and by my father's grey head. But, by the way, madam, how do you know that the boy you took from the hospital was indeed your brother?"

"By the child's general appearance and his resemblance to my dear father. Besides, the clothes he had on afforded a certain proof. The little white night dress had been made by my own hands, and the pattern of Hannah's old red shawl had been familiar to me from childhood."

"How long did you keep the child?"

"He remained with me two years at Greenwarren. Oh! why did I not, when it lay in my power, make known the secret of his birth and restore him his rightful heritage? Why was I so weak and wicked? Had I acted openly then, I should have spared myself and him perhaps years of misery."

"It was scarcely to be expected, madam, that you would reveal that secret, thereby depriving yourself of the greater part of the fortune of which you were in actual possession."

"God knows that it was no selfish motive that actuated me. I feared the loss of the property would drive my husband to desperation, and I feared still more that should the affair be investigated and the whole truth come to light, his guilty participation in it would be proved. Poor little Cecil! I thought to atone to him by unceasing love and kindness, by lavishing on him money and caresses, for the unjust withholding of his rights, but God will avenge the cause of oppressed innocence. I have suffered bitterly indeed."

"Mrs. Wilmot, I am sorry for your trouble, and were it in my power to alleviate it, would do so with pleasure. If your

brother has been kidnapped through the instrumentality of any of my people, it was done during my absence and without my knowledge, and he shall be restored to you again ; or, at least, I will ascertain his fate. My will is law wherever my dominion extends, and though my people are a scattered race, I have certain means of communicating with all of them. Wilmot probably feared that you would be led by your affection for the child to divulge the secret, and he consequently got him out of the way. When was he missed ?”

“On the 2nd of April, 17—. He had been playing in the garden, and was never afterwards seen. There was considerable delay in searching for him, as the nurse, fearing my anger, and supposing him to be somewhere about the grounds, did not inform me of his disappearance immediately. We had every reason to think that a gipsy woman, who had come to the house begging on the previous day, had lured him away.”

Carew meditated for some time in silence.

“If Wilmot employed one of our people for that purpose, it was probably Rachel Scott. She shall be sought for and questioned. In the meantime set your mind at rest, dear lady ; and be assured that if your brother be alive anywhere upon the face of the earth, the king of the gipsies will be able to discover him.”

Bampfylde Moore Carew fulfilled his promise ; but it was not till some months afterwards that Adelaide Wilmot welcomed a tall, sun-burnt young man, and clasped him to her heart. She had no difficulty in recognising in the gipsy youth Pretty Billy, or rather Cecil Henry Armitage, her long-lost brother. He had remained some years with the wandering tribe to which Rachel Scott belonged, and had been taught to call her mother, till Adelaide and Greenwarren and every event of his childish years became but a faint memory. Grown up to be a fine lad he sickened of the gipsy life, to which perhaps his natural disposition had not inclined him, and embracing the profession of a sailor, had joined one of his Majesty’s ships of war.

My story is ended ; unless you care to hear how Cecil Henry Armitage married a fair daughter of a noble house, and the once dreary home at Greenwarren became peopled in an incredibly short time with pretty sprightly inhabitants ; how the nursery was enlarged, and another wing added to the house ; how old Parson Rogers,—grown very old then—sat by the fireside on winter evenings, and told strange stories and talked prosy nonsense which no one understood or cared to listen to except “Aunt Adelaide.”

Adelaide Wilmot appeared to have grown young again in her old age, for she had discovered the secret of a peace formerly unknown to her ; and in sharing the happiness of her brother and his children, learned to look back with less bitterness on the trials of her early life.

# THE COTTAGE ON THE CLIFF.

---

## CHAPTER I.

### WHO COULD SHE BE?

There is something very pleasant on a calm summer day in wandering on an isolated beach, where the smooth sand is marked with no impression of human footsteps, while the waves advance with a gentle, rippling sound and retire languidly again, leaving a broad line of dark seaward and shells, cast up by the deep in its more boisterous moments, with many other curious and beautiful things for children to play with and wonder at and for the scientific to speculate about. It is very pleasant to stand there alone, unmolested by importunate boatmen and bathing-women, fashionable loungers, or noisy, sand-digging children, and to step freely over the untrodden sand, sacred to ourselves, the cormorants, and the seagulls. So seemed to think a certain young lady, as she sat on a piece of drifted timber, on a little lonely beach not far from the village of North Rood, watching the clear waves gradually advancing higher and higher. She was a very lovely girl, though there was a peculiarly grave, mournful expression on her face as she remained with her eyes fixed intently on the sea; but perhaps it might have been rather an earnest, thoughtful expression than a sad one, and in solitude the thoughts of most of us are apt to take a serious turn. She was quite a young girl, eighteen, perhaps, or twenty at the most, neither tall nor short, and with a figure of exquisite proportions, and her hair, which was very dark, fell in long waving masses over her shoulders. Her dress was simple in the extreme—a shirt of lilac print, with a holland jacket—but she wore a large brown straw hat, a fashion not then introduced among the lower orders, and her neat little kid boots and well fitting gloves, in addition to a certain grace about her not to be mistaken, would have made one at once set her down as a lady. So long she sat there motionless and wrapt in thought that she had not perceived the rapid though gradual encroachment made by the tide in the little lonely bay, till the



water at last, rushing up almost to her feet, forced her to rise from the piece of timber which had formed her seat and to retire for a short distance. Then she perceived, not without a slight expression of alarm, that the waves were washing over the rocks on either side of her. The tiny bay was only, in fact, approachable that way at low water, being shut in by high rocks, over which the waves were now lazily dashing, having gradually covered the accumulation of fallen stones which lay at their base. Half an hour before the young girl had climbed to the summit of an immense fragment of rock, which had at some distant period of time broken away from the cliff and rolled into the sea ; now it stood in the midst of the waves, massive and grand, looking like a monstrous elephant with a bishop's mitre on his head. On the opposite side nothing could be seen but the dark-tops of the seaweed covered stones appearing and disappearing like porpoises here and there in the water. The lonely girl was at first a little startled, but on observing her position more narrowly she soon discovered that there was no great cause for alarm. Turning her back upon the treacherous sea, which had so ungallantly cut off her means of retreat, and looking towards the land, she perceived, it is true, a high perpendicular cliff, ascending, as it seemed, almost into the clouds, whose ivy-covered summit afforded a safe home to a multitude of jackdaws, who had built their nests in sundry holes and crevices there, quite secure from molestation ; but at the foot of this huge rock, and sloping away in an easterly direction towards the little village of Rood, was a narrow path or road, by which donkeys and men were accustomed to descend to procure loads of seaweed ; and about half-way up, on a small piece of waste ground, forming a kind of ledge or terrace by the side of the road, stood a small cottage, with a patch of potato ground adjoining. It was a strange spot for a human habitation to be built on, for the projecting summit of the white rock above seemed to overhang it in a manner suggestive of peril ; but the cliff had remained unmoved in its mighty grandeur for centuries perhaps, and within the memory of man had undergone no perceptible change, and it seemed likely enough to remain unaltered till the final annihilation of all things. The situation of the cottage struck the young lady probably as peculiar and picturesque, for she paused in her ascent up the steep pathway, and leaning against the little rude gate which formed the entrance to the potato-ground, stood looking at the cottage in the same abstracted manner in which she had before been gazing on the sea. She seemed very idle and objectless, and to be in no haste at least to continue her walk towards the village where she was probably bound. Attracted by the novel sight of a well-dressed stranger standing at her gate apparently desirous of admission, the old woman who was the only inhabitant of the cottage

issued from the low door, and stood regarding her would-be visitor with considerable curiosity. The lady seeing that she was observed felt it incumbent on her to say something :

"You have a pretty cottage here. I have been admiring those beautiful wall-flowers."

"Yes, miss, they be most the only flowers as I can get to grow—the soil's so poor."

"I suppose so. Flowers do not flourish well in general near the sea, I believe. Do you live alone here?"

"Alone, miss? Yes, sure, I've neither chick nor child, and my old man has been dead this fifteen year come Michaelmas."

"It is a lonely situation for you. Have you any neighbours nearer than the village?"

"There's no houses nearer nor Rood; but that bain't much more than three-quarters of a mile away, and I've a cat as is tolerable good company. That's he, miss, a sitting 'upon the roof there, nigh to the chimney. He's an uncommon clever cat, and wonderful good-tempered he is; but the folks from the village drop in often enough and the boys be a goin' backward and forward with the sea-weed, so you see it bain't so very lonesome like. I've had lodgers afore now, but they found it inconvenient, being so far from the village, 'specially the young woman as is a blind orphan and makes the baskets—she that was taught at the 'Sylum, miss—and she went to lodge with Susan Hobbs as sells marine stores at Rood, which was a lowish sort of a place, as I told her, for one as had been used to everything clean and tidy; but maidens does like a bit of life and gaiety, even though they be blind."

"How could you manage to find room for a lodger? The house seems so small."

"Why, bless you, miss, our kitchen here would hold a dozen or more, if there were need, and the bedroom opposite is most good enough for the squire, I was going to say; and when I has lodgers I can make shift very well with the little room at the back, which isn't to say uncomfortable, though, owing to the window coming close agin the rock, and the ivy a growing down over it, it bain't so light by a deal as the other rooms. La, miss, it's a noble house, I can assure 'ee; and my poor old man—a mason he was, miss, and understood the business better than most—he built it with his own hands, every stone on it. 'There, missus,' said he, 'when I be dead and gone you'll always have a roof over your head, bad times and good; and curses be on him that would try to turn you out of it.'"

"Does the cottage belong to you, then?"

"Belong to me?—why yes, miss! Didn't I tell you my old man put every stone of it together? And though folks do try to make out as the land properly belongs to the squire, as lord of the manor or what it is—this poor little corner of rock, and

he with, I don't know how many fine acres !—I've never been called upon for nothing by he, nor never shall be, I reckon. You're a looking at the hole in the roof, miss ;—it's where the thatch was blown off in the gale two years ago, and I've never troubled to have it mended, It weren't convenient for some reasons, 'cos the bit of money I gets by my knitting and what poor Isaac and I saved up bain't more than enough to keep me in clothes and vittles pretty comfortable ; and it bain't of so much consequence about the hole, 'cos it comes right over the bit of a place where I keeps my sticks and potatoes, and when it rains very hard I covers it up with an old sack. My old man would have patched it up hisself if he had been living, poor soul ; wonderful clever and 'cute he was, miss, I assure 'ee, and the last bit of work as ever he did was cutting out and carving of his own tombstone, with two angels' heads on the top with wings coming out of 'em as natural as anything, and his name, and the beautifullest epitaph as ever you read. You can see it any day in Rood churchyard—and nothing but his age and the date to fill up, as was finished afterwards by young Thomas Rowe ; and he was beginning of mine, and had got as far as a skull and cross-bones when he was took with the complaint as he died of. But I ask pardon, miss ; here have I been a going on telling about all sorts, and never noticed as how bad you was. Do'ee come in and sit down a bit."

The young lady was leaning heavily against the post of the gate, and a dizzy feeling of faintness was gradually coming over her.

"I will go in for a few moments, if you please," she said, making an effort to control herself. "Perhaps you can give me a glass of water."

Mrs. Giles offered her arm to support the young lady.

"Lean on me, miss, and come in—I'll make a strong cup of tea in a few moments—the water's nigh upon boiling now. You does look bad that's certain !"

"I am exhausted," replied the girl, "and feel the want of something to support me ; a cup of tea if you can get me one would be welcome indeed."

She did not say that she had not tasted food since she rose in the morning, which was actually the case, but suffered herself to be led into the clean kitchen which Mrs. Giles had pronounced sufficiently spacious to hold a dozen or more, and sat down near the open door, declining the pressing invitation of her hostess to get a bit nearer to the fire. The room, though small, was the perfection of cleanliness and neatness. The furniture consisted of a well-polished dresser, adorned with shining rows of jugs, cups, and dishes of the commonest ware and showiest patterns, in the centre of which stood a handsome china bowl, dating back to the time of Queen Anne, and representing a

hunting scene which might have roused the envy of a collector, an old-fashioned clock in a tall oak case, a small round deal table, and three chairs to match. Old Mrs. Giles had soon taken down her best tea-cup and saucer, with a small tea-pot of black earthenware, wiped them carefully with a clean cloth, and placed them on a small tray adorned with representations of flowers and butterflies, which could vie in variety and brightness of hue with the costliest *papier mâché*, apologising, as she did so, for the want of a damask cloth to lay on the table.

"I knows what gentlefolks looks for, if I am a poor body myself," she said; "for I lived at the Manor House under house-maid nigh upon two years before poor Giles and me got married, and afterwards I used to do all the washing at Parson Ogden's, of South Rood, where they kept a sight of company. But that's many years agone for certain, and I forgets a good deal; but I suppose gentlefolks baint much changed in their ways and likings now-a-days. Bless me! I thought as I'd got two or three lumps of loaf sugar in the canister, and there's ne'er a bit left. I remember now, Betsy Jones borrowed the last of it for her christening party, 'cos she didn't like to tell her good man as she'd spent one and eightpence-halfpenny on a bit 'broidery stuff to trim the baby's frock and tippet, and lending's all one with giving with such as her; but maybe you'll excuse a bit of brown, miss?"

"Thank you—I never take sugar. Oh, it is so nice! I am so much obliged!"

"Now, miss, if you will please to excuse the coarse loaf; its downright good bread, for I gets the flour of the miller over at Cloverley, and Farmer Morris's wife her bakes it for me in her oven. I've a quarter of a pound of butter here as is just fresh from the dairy. I'm terribly particular about my butter—it's the only thing most as I am particular about, for a little does for me so as it's wholesome and clean."

The young lady seemed to appreciate the brown bread and butter, for she ate two or three slices of it apparently with much relish, and took a second cup of tea. Then she took out a well-filled purse, and seemed to be hesitating how much she should offer for the refreshment. If she had remained for a long time fasting it was not for want of the means to procure food.

"You must allow me to pay for what I have taken," she said, "and I am very much obliged to you."

"You be quite welcome, miss, and I don't look for nothing, I'm sure. Shall I walk up with you to the village, or wherever it is you be a goin' to, for you don't seem strong enough to go by yourself?"

"Thank you—thank you—but I have not quite made up my mind where I am going. They tell me at the little inn at Rood, the Cat and the Fiddle, I think it is called, that General Cameron no longer resides at the Briary."

"Oh no, miss, the eldest young lady died rather sudden, and the family is gone to foreign parts, either Indy or Garmany, I don't rightly mind which, but it's pretty much the same I suppose. A young gentleman lives there now as is called Bellew, leas'tways he comes now and then with some of his rollicking friends. He's bought the place, so folks say, for the shooting—not that I could make out for the life of me why rich gentlemen as can afford to buy as many hares and pheasants as they like should spend so much money and take so much trouble to shoot 'em. I'm sure they must be sick and tired of game, to see the lots as they kills sometimes, but I believe they gives away half of 'em."

"I called at the house, hoping to learn some news of General Cameron, and I saw him—a tall, handsome young man, with dark moustaches and whiskers."

"Yes, miss, he's a fine-looking young gentleman enough, though I don't quite like the looks of him; and little Alice Lane—— But that's neither here nor there. Did you want to go to the Briary, miss?"

"Oh, no—certainly not. I only wished to see General Cameron; but Mr. Bellew knew nothing of him except that he had gone to Germany. I suppose I must stay to-night at the village. Are the people at the Cat and the Fiddle respectable?"

"La, yes, miss! Why, Martha Bridges was a farmer's daughter, and quite high and mighty like with her muslin gowns and silk bonnets before she took up with Bridges, and except for taking a drop too much now and then, which a landlord sometimes is forced to do when customers is pressing, and he having a leaning that way himself. I've nothing to say agen Bridges. It was the only failing as ever my poor Giles was given to, and he never quite leaved it off till he took up with the teetotallers, just three months before his death, and then for certain he was bed-ridden, and could'n't go to the public, and I took good care as no ale or spirits should come anigh the house, 'cos the doctor had given particular orders that he wasn't to take none, owing to the inflammation going right up his leg and getting into his stomach. But what was you askin' of me? Oh! about the Bridgeses. Yes, they is respectable, and the Cat and Fiddle is reckoned to be the quietest house hereabouts 'ceptin' on club days; but still it bain't the place for real young ladies like you to bide in, and alone too."

"Yes, I know that, but I can't help it. I mean I can't help being alone." She sighed as she spoke.

"Bless me! and haven't you no one—not even a maid?"

"No, I am quite alone. I have no home, no friend—no friend anywhere but God!" said the girl, solemnly, fixing her dark eyes on the wide expanse of ocean in front of her, for she had risen from her seat and stood in the small garden just outside

the cottage door. What glorious eyes they were—large, melting, and dark, with their fringe of long silken lashes and delicately-penciled brows! No wonder that Percival Bellew, of the Briary, had turned round to take another look at them, and forestalled his servant in opening the lodge gate as the fair unknown quitted his premises in the morning. Even old Salome Giles, who had outlived what little romance she might ever have had, stood gazing at them admiringly.

"I never saw such a handsome face," she said to herself, "'cepting' the large picture at the end of the squire's gallery, which is a likeness of the squire's great grand-mother, so they say, and a wonderful beauty, as his Majesty King George or King Charles, I can't rightly mind which, used to make a mighty do about. Excuse me, miss," she said aloud at length, "but you're a deal too young and too pretty to be travelling about alone this fashion; not but what Martha Bridges will do her best to make you comfortable. But do'ee come in—it's a goin' to rain awful."

In fact, large heavy drops were already beginning to fall, and the distant rumbling of thunder had been for some time threatening a storm. The young lady re-entered the house, and in a few minutes the rain was descending in torrents.

"It was lucky as we hadn't set off. You've nothing but that bit of a—— There, I never can mind what you ladies call it—a parasol, bain't it? And my umbrella do let in the rain terrible, for all a man as comes to the door put a fresh cover on it only five years ago. We should have got mortal wet."

"Yes, it is fortunate. And, indeed, I feel so ill I think, I could scarcely have walked to the village."

"You does look bad, miss, that's certain! I made sure just now as you were a goin' to be took with a fit, like a young woman as lived general servant at Farmer Morris's, and used to fall away quite promiscuous whenever they was goin' to have company, or there was any extra washing to do; and the missus, with her best silk gown a pinned up round her, obliged to set to, to butter the toast, and cut up the cakes, and wash up the tea-things. We used to fear as she'd never come to, but she got all right after a time with burnt feathers and brandy; and finished a good quart bottle of brandy, I've heard Mrs. Morris say, before she leaved, and only staid till her month was up."

"The heavy rain continued falling for near a couple of hours and by the time it had ceased the evening had begun to close in.

"It is getting quite dark," said the young lady, rising; "I really must go. Will you be so kind as to walk with me as far as the village?"

"Oh, miss, it's streaming wet under foot, and you with

them bits of boots as is little better than paper ; and the red clay on the rock sticks awful in wet weather. It's a good mile this way to the village. I wish you hadn't to go."

Her visitor smiled for the first time since her entrance.

"But you see I must go ; there is no help for it."

"Why, excuse me, miss, I've been thinking whether you can put up with my bit of a room for to-night—its clean and airy, and I'll put on a pair of linen sheets and make it nice and comfortable."

"You are very kind. Yes, why not ? I should prefer it much to sleeping at the inn."

"But maybe you'd be wanting your boxes and what not from the village—young ladies is always so particular ; but maybe I can get one of the boys as works at Farmer Morris's to fetch 'em for you."

"I have but one small box, which I left at the inn, but just for to-night I can manage without anything. I will lie down on your bed without undressing, if you can give it up without inconvenience, and try to get a few hours' sleep."

"Yes, do'ee, miss, there's a dear young lady. I beg your pardon, miss, but I don't know what to call you."

"Miss Gordon—Amy Gordon—that is my name. Good night, kind Mrs. Giles !" And as she held out her hand towards the old woman there were tears in the large soft eyes.

Later in the evening, when the moonlight was streaming through the narrow casement windows of the cottage, old Salome Giles stood by the humble bed and watched the sleeping girl as she reposed calmly, the patchwork quilt laid carelessly over her, and her long hair falling in dishevelled locks over the low pillow. "Her's a pretty creature," mused the old woman, sadly, "but there's a summat wrong—summat as didn't ought to be, that's sure. Maybe she's run'd away from boardin' school, or there's a sweetheart has got to do with it—some good-for-nothin' young chap has been and turned her poor head—one of them soldier officers I shouldn't wonder. They makes terrible work among the girls so I've been told. If she's run'd away she bain't married yet, that's certain—there's no wedding ring on her hand, nothing but that there gimcrack with blue bead on it—what a bit of a white hand it is ; it never did an hour's hard work I'd wager. If the young chap had meant for to marry her he'd be with her now I should think. I hope she's not got herself into any very bad misfortune like little Alice Lane did, poor creature. She's not one of a bad lot I can tell by her manners. If she'd got anything terrible upon her mind she wouldn't be sleeping so sweet, I'm thinking. Bad consciences bring bad dreams. I hope she's only been and run'd away from school or a cruel mother-in-law ; or perhaps the poor thing bain't right in her head. There—she moved her arm ; I'm feared as I shall wake her, so I'll go to bed myself now. To-morrow I shall know more about it, maybe."

## CHAPTER II.

---

### HOW SEA-BATHING AGREED WITH THE CURATE.

The morrow came and went, and the curiosity of Salome Giles remained ungratified. Miss Gordon, as she was desirous of being called, showed no wish to quit her humble lodging ; indeed, she was very restless and feverish for several days, and scarcely appeared in a state to bear the fatigue of removal. Her box had been fetched from the inn, and old Salome supplied with money to procure all things necessary for the comfort of her guest, whose requirements were moderate in extreme. On the fourth day after Miss Gordon's arrival at the Cliff Cottage Mrs. Giles, who was busy weeding her little bit of garden plot, perceived young Mr. Edward Delafosse, the curate of Rood, climbing up the rocky path from the beach, with his towels hanging over his arm. He had been down to bathe, as was his custom, in the little cove at high water, and was making his way slowly through a forest of tall mallows, scarlet poppies, and wild mustard, his very unclerical straw hat at times scarcely rising above the wild mass of luxuriant vegetation, for he was not very tall of stature.

"Good morning, Mrs. Giles," he said, as he reached the small gate of the garden, raising his hat, not so much out of courtesy—though he was ever courteous in manner even to the humble and poor—as to smooth back the profusion of curly chesnut hair, still damp with sea-water, from his heated brow. "Rather a warm morning, is it not ? Good hay-making weather."

"Yes, your reverence"—old Salome was very particular in giving everyone what she conceived to be his correct title—"and I was just a wishin' to speak to you, sir, when I caught sight of the top of your hat a comin' through them weeds yonder."

"You wished to explain why you were not at church last Sunday either in the morning or evening, eh, Mrs. Giles ? Were you disappointed of your new gown, or have you had another attack of rheumatism ?"

"No, sir, thank God, "I've enjoyed my health tolerable ever since Christmas, and as for a new gown I know your reverence likes a joke, but I'm no follower after new fashions like some of the youngsters—the worse for them sometimes ; but the young



lady weren't very well all Sunday. She's enjoyed middling bad health ever since she come'd here, and I didn't like to leave the poor creature alone. 'Twas about her I wanted to speak."

"What young lady?"

"Miss Gordon, sir—her as lodged with me the last four days, and I'm terrible afraid there's summat very wrong about her. She's wrote to no one, and no one has been after her, as they would have done by this time if there hadn't been summat wrong."

Mrs. Giles had closed the gate, and advanced some distance to meet Mr. Delafosse, and had lowered her voice almost to a whisper.

"Who is she?"

"I don't know nothing at all about her. She came in quite promiscuous, and I asked her to stop because of the thunder and lightning, and her seeming so bad, and its getting late."

"Is she in distress?"

"La, no, sir—not at all, she's got plenty of money, and is a born lady I believe, and I can tell a lady as well as most; but there is surely summat wrong, and I think her friends ought to know it."

"Where are her friends?"

"I can't get it out of her whether she's any friends or not, she's so terrible close and artful, I thought, maybe, she'd tell you—leastways you could ask her."

"I should not like to intrude upon her without some reason, Mrs. Giles; she might think it impertinent. If she is really ill I should advise you to send for Mr. Flint."

"I've been recommending of her to see the doctor, sir, but she won't hear of it; not that she is downright bad, but only weak and nervous like. I always holds with sending for he when folks be real bad; for, says I, if what he sends bain't no use at all—and most times doctors doesn't know half as much as women like me has had experience—says I, there's no need to take all the doctors sends, or to do all as they says, only you've done the right thing in calling of 'em in, and can please yourself afterwards. Why, sir, Betsy Chubb, when she was down so long in the fever, never swallowed a drop of the doctor's stuff, though he sent bottle after bottle reg'lar, not knowing but what it were took'd; and so it was, for her sister-in-law, as was bad with a carbuncle on her head, took every drop of it, and wonderful good it did her, that I will say; but Betsy, her'd never have been cured but for peony flowers and ground ivy. You boil 'em down, sir——"

"But about the young lady, Mrs. Giles? I will make some excuse to call in some time this afternoon, if you think she would not object to see me."

"Thank 'ee sir, and she'll take it very kind, I'm sure. She's

a pretty creature, sir, as ever you set eyes on, and worth going fifty mile or more to see."

Whether the old woman's remarks concerning her guest's beauty tended in any way to heighten the curate's curiosity to become acquainted with the mysterious stranger I cannot take upon me to say, but he did not forget his promise, and towards the evening paid another visit to the Cliff Cottage with the last number of some religious periodical for old Salome's perusal on Sunday evening.

Amy was seated on a low bench in front of the cottage taking a lesson in knitting from Dame Giles, and she received the young clergyman—who was introduced to her with the needless apology, "You needn't be afraid, miss, it's only our parson, Mr. Delafosse"—with ladylike courtesy. The young man felt shy and nervous in addressing the pretty stranger, who appeared to be so peculiarly and awkwardly situated, and she had coloured, and seemed slightly embarrassed on his first approach; but after a few words had been exchanged the conversation between them soon became easy and animated, and discussions on the beauty of the scenery led imperceptibly to the introduction of other topics interesting to both; so that when Mr. Delafosse had been standing for some time opposite to her Amy moved to make room for him on the bench where she was seated.

How quickly the time seemed to pass, seated in that beautiful spot, overlooking the smooth beach and the broad ocean, with the scent of the wall-flowers and honeysuckles all round, and those large, dark, lustrous eyes beaming with feeling and animation, as painting, poetry, and music were in turns discussed, and every word spoken by those rosy lips told more and more of the beauty and purity of the mind that dictated them. Poor Edward Delafosse! He quite forgot his appointment to examine the children at the National School and his intention of walking over to the Hawthorns to see Farmer Price's sick wife. Delighted that her visitor had found a congenial companion, the old woman had gladly retired within the house to continue her favourite occupation of scrubbing and cleaning, so the conversation had been as free and uninterrupted as it was delightful. When at last, becoming suddenly conscious and ashamed of the length of his stay, Mr. Delafosse rose to make his parting bow, held for a moment the slender white hand which was extended cordially towards him, and quitted the place where he had spent so agreeable an hour, he knew nothing more about Amy Gordon than when he had reached it, only that she was very beautiful and very clever, and possessed a highly cultivated mind and tender, loving heart. Of these facts he felt certain; but who were her friends?—where was her home?—why was she there? Of all this he was still in the profoundest ignorance. But a vision of those beautiful eyes

haunted him unceasingly during the ensuing night ; fragments of the conversation which had taken place continually recurred to his mind and hindered his sleeping. So lovely a being had never crossed his path before, and the mystery concerning her only tended to render her more interesting. Sundry excuses did the young man make to himself for lingering frequently in the vicinity of the Cliff Cottage. His health now required that he should bathe every day instead of three times a week as had been his previous custom. It was necessary that he should lay in a stock of knitted lambswool socks for the winter, and only Salome Giles was capable of making them. He found fault with his former sketches of the cliffs and beach, and carried out pencils and colours to make new ones ; he was seized with a sudden desire of attempting flower painting, and succeeded in executing one or two gaudy groups of scarlet poppies and wall-flowers. He was not long in discovering that Miss Gordon had a splendid mezzo-soprano voice, and longed for her assistance in conducting the obstinate and untractable village choir, but he hesitated about making the request. Amy had not long been established as an inmate of the Cliff Cottage before she informed her hostess that her little store of money was nearly exhausted, and before it was quite gone she was desirous of finding some employment by means which she might sustain herself. "I have been very unfortunate," she said, "and I have no home. I should like to remain here, if you are willing I should do so, and I will endeavour by my own exertions to continue the weekly sum I have been paying for my board, and my wants, as you know, are few. I should like to establish a little school, if there are any respectable families here who might be induced to entrust the education of their children to me."

"Well, miss, there's nothing I should like better than to have you stay here, even if so be as you couldn't pay quite as much as you've done ; and there's Farmer Morris's wife as would be mortal glad, I know, to get good school teaching for her girls, summat a little out of the common, you know, for she's very anxious to bring 'em up genteel ; and I shouldn't wonder if Mrs. Bridges, of the Cat and Fiddle, would send her Evelina and Sarah Jane ; and there's Mrs. Bartlett's children at shop, and maybe I can think of some others ; and I'm sure Mr. Delafosse will say all he can in the way of a recommend, and you so reg'lar at church and all that, miss, and I've no doubt you'll get on capital. You won't ask less nor sixpence a week, of course, miss, to keep it high and genteel, for they gives two-pence at Maria Clarke's up in the village, where most of the labourers' children goes, and she bain't not near so much of a scholar as I be as don't pretend to much neither."

"I have not quite settled yet about terms," replied Amy

smiling, "but try what you can to procure me some scholars, and I will speak to Mr. Delafosse."

In a short time six or seven neatly-dressed little girls came to the Cliff Cottage for daily instruction, and through being wholly unused to tuition Miss Gordon found her task at first somewhat difficult and laborious; she soon began to take interest in the advancement of her pupils, and to feel a certain degree of pleasure in endeavouring to train their young uncultivated minds. There were many evil weeds to root out, but there were also lovely and holy seeds to be sown, and two or three among her scholars gave promise of rewarding the care bestowed upon them.

The arrival of Miss Gordon seemed, in fact, to have worked many and great changes in the quiet village of Rood. Mr. Bellew, who had never before made his appearance at church, now attended the service every Sunday, both in the morning and afternoon. He no longer stopped to talk with little Alice Lane, as she sat at her work outside her mother's door; and poor Alice had grown pale and weak, and was likely, the neighbours said, to go into a decline; and her mother wished over and over again, as she watched her sinking, that Mr. Bellew had never come over the threshold of her door, for all he had been so generous with his coals and flannels at Christmas. That green silk gown hadn't made poor Alice one bit the better or happier, though she thought so much of it at the time, and what was the use of the pink roses under her bonnet when her eyes were always red with crying, not fit to be seen? Mr. Bellew never wanted baskets now, and ceased to trouble poor blind Naomi who had never liked him over well, though he had bought so much of her work, and was always paying her compliments. But stranger things were to happen yet. Old Ruth Lane, Alice's grandmother, had found herself too infirm to continue the management of the Sunday School. "The girls was as pert and idle as could be," she said, "and as for the boys they didn't mind a word she said to 'em; for all she threatened 'em continual with the cane, and hobbled after 'em as well as she could with her crutches, they only laughed at her and runn'd away."

It was absolutely necessary to appoint a new mistress, and who so suitable as Miss Gordon, who got on Farmer Morris's girls so well? Then, of all things in the world, Mr. Bellew declared himself to be a great critic about music; his sensitive ear suffered excruciating torture from the false notes and drawing nasal tones of the village choir, and from the effect of the violin and flute always playing the same tune in different keys. He was becoming a church goer, and it seemed he was determined to have good music—though the parishioners generally were quite satisfied that things should continue as they were—for he actually went so far as to present the parish with a handsome organ.

“But who was to play the organ now it was come?” said the hostess of the Cat and Fiddle and Farmer Morris’s wife, and a host of others. Mr. Bellew and the curate both felt convinced that there was a person who could undertake the office of organist if she was willing to do so. Miss Gordon was persuaded to try, and modestly and simply she played one or two chants, accompanying them with her rich, beautiful voice. The effect was magical. Her hearers—consisting of Mr. Bellew, Mr. Delafosse, and the clerk—pronounced that if two or three of the best voices of the choir could be trained to take their parts with her the music would be superb; and Miss Gordon was soon installed as Sunday schoolmistress, organist, and leader and teacher of the village choir. There was little difficulty in raising a subscription for her salary, the vicar and squire, though non-resident, each contributing something, and Mr. Bellew himself giving a very handsome sum. The appointment gave general satisfaction, except to the first violin and flute, and one or two of the singers, with a few discontented persons who took part with the violin and flute, and betook themselves in indignation to the new Independent Chapel, where a gentleman, who exercised the profession of a bootmaker during the week at a neighbouring town, astonished a small congregation on Sundays with a very loud and animated discourse.

## CHAPTER III.

---

### MR. BELLEW PROVES HIMSELF A LOVER OF MUSIC.

Her situation as Sunday school teacher necessarily threw Amy more than ever into the society of Edward Delafosse, and the better he became acquainted with her the stronger grew the admiration he felt—the great love, in fact, which he entertained for her. And Amy was aware of his love. Oh yes, she could not but know it; and certainly she had not discouraged it in any way. On the contrary, she seemed pleased with his homage, interested in his conversation, and tenderly anxious about all that concerned him. How warmly she had greeted him the day of his return from that short visit to his mother in Cumberland—with what a sweet smile and blush! How she sympathised with him in all his pastoral cares and trials, which, somehow or other, were always confided to her! How she tried as much as lay in her power to relieve him of extra fatigue in the school—how much sympathy she showed when he was in distress about his brother in India, and how anxious she seemed during the slight attack of illness which had prevented his officiating as usual on Trinity Sunday! Surely she was aware of his love, and not indifferent to it? Mr. Percival Bellew had a sly, underhand way of watching and following Amy—he had taken advantage of the kind of acquaintance which had been formed on her visit to the Briary to speak to her whenever they met—but then Amy never seemed to take any notice of him except to be coldly and cautiously civil, and to keep him at a distance as much as possible by her grave, calm manner and almost haughty air. With Delafosse she was never haughty—rather humble and submissive, ever ready to ask and to follow his advice. He could not be jealous of Bellew, yet with a lover's anxiety he viewed with secret disapproval his little covert attentions to Amy. There were some persons in the village accustomed to act up to the strictest rules of propriety, and some who, having erred themselves, were the more ready to suspect error in others, who voted that Miss Gordon should not have been elected to offices of such importance without something more of her antecedents being known; but the curate and Mr. Bellew being, as was suspected, both in love, had overruled all objections, and the squire's family being at

that time absent from the Manor House the matter was the more easily negotiated. The vicar of North Rood seldom interfered in any concerns of the pariah, he being a good, easy sort of man, who thought he had done quite enough in paying a curate to stand in his place there while he got lazily through his duties at his larger living at South Rood, about four miles distant; and as in this instance the curate was earnest and indefatigable in attending to his duties the parishioners had no loss. It was Amy's custom to practice alone in the church every Friday afternoon, and Mr. Delafosse would often find an excuse to enter the church at the same time, to listen with delight to the soft, delicious harmony, which spoke more forcibly to his soul than the mingled voices of the choir on Sunday, though Miss Gordon, with singular judgment, had selected three or four of the best, and managed to teach them to modulate their tones in a wonderful manner. He would sit below, an enraptured listener, and when the music had ceased, would sometimes ascend to the organ loft, under pretence of consulting the fair organist concerning the psalms or hymns to be sung on the following Sunday or to offer his services in arranging and replacing the music books.

One afternoon Amy was still seated at the organ, when she heard a man's footsteps coming up the stairs. The person whom she concluded to be no other than Mr. Delafosse, paused as he reached the gallery, as if fearing to interrupt her or listening to the music. Amy had been trying for the first time the beautiful evening hymn, commencing—

“ Abide with me, fast falls the eventide,”

and as she concluded the last verse she felt a man's hand firmly, but gently laid on her shoulder. She gave a sudden start. It was not Edward Delafosse—he would never have ventured on such a familiar act, intimate as they had lately become—almost like brother and sister. Turning round she perceived Mr. Bellev's handsome, rather sinister-looking face, bending over her so closely, that she could feel his warm breath on her face, and even fancied she felt the end of his long-pointed moustache just touching her cheek.

“ Your music has fascinated me, Amy; I was passing through the churchyard and could not resist the temptation of lingering to listen,” he said in a low, soft voice.

“ Call me Miss Gordon, if you please,” she replied hastily rising, “ I am only Amy to my friends.”

“ And am I not your friend, then? Let me at least bear that title, if——”

“ Excuse me, I meant of course my nearest and dearest friends. Allow me to pass, if you please, for I have already lingered here longer than I should have done.”

"Nearest and dearest ! It would be indeed a privilege to stand in that relation towards you. But why may I not hope to be one of those nearest and dearest ?"

"You are forgetting our different positions, Mr. Bellew, and speaking in a manner which I cannot possibly allow."

"I am quite aware of the difference ; but I don't care a rush for what the world may say or think. Whoever you may be, you are a lovely girl, Amy !"

"I have no desire to hear more, and I have forbidden you to call me Amy ! Let me pass, if you please !"

"There—I will not offend again. But, by Jove, I believe I have heard that fellow Delafosse call you Amy !"

He did not perceive the sudden flush which came over the girl's face, for she had resumed the hat and veil which she had taken off while singing.

"Speak more respectfully of one who is infinitely your superior in every important respect !" she said, in a voice which trembled with mingled confusion and anger. "But you are mistaken. Mr. Delafosse never called me by my Christian name—at least he is not in the habit of doing so." She blushed as she corrected herself, remembering that the curate had once or twice made use of the familiar appellation, inadvertently perhaps.

"Well, Miss Gordon—if I must call you so—I hope you are only acting with a view of tormenting me, after the fashion of your sex, in trying to make it appear that you prefer a milk-sop of a young curate to me," said Mr. Bellew, bitterly. Then he suddenly resumed the tender tone : "Amy—I can't, for the life of me, helpsaying Amy, in spite of your prohibition—I want to have a long quiet talk with you alone. When and where do you think you could meet me ?"

"I have no intention of meeting you at all, and you have chosen a strange time and place, I think, to speak to me in such a manner. Do you remember where we are ?" she added, in a low voice. "Let me pass instantly."

Mr. Bellew descended the stairs, and held out his hand to assist Amy in doing so, but she rejected the aid offered, and they walked side by side out of the church by the little belfry door.

"Now that we are outside these walls you will be less scrupulous, perhaps. It is strange what reverence some people pay to a heap of old stones and mortar ! Now do promise to walk with me to-morrow morning early, or late in the evening if you are afraid of scandalous tongues. I'll wait for you on the beach, near the Elephant and Mitre ; or we could walk over the cliffs through the fields towards South Rood—we should meet no one there."

"Mr. Bellew, you appear to be one of those who refuse to take no for an answer. I have told you before I will walk nowhere with you."



"A lady's 'no.' Your sex deal in negatives, but they often mean 'yes' all the time. I've found that out before now. Amy, you are a beautiful creature—you are, indeed!—and as I said before, I don't care a straw what your connections may be. Whatever you are, or whatever you may have been, I love you—love you dearly!"

"I have no wish to hear any more. If you have any feelings of a gentleman you will be silent, and leave me in peace."

"Is it such a sin, then, in your estimation, to be in love, and to confess it?"

"There are different ways of confessing, and you have chosen a very objectionable one."

"Had I been more fortunate then in my manner of expressing my feelings——"

"Had you told me in a proper manner that I had unconsciously won your regard I should have declined it politely, and expressed my sincere regret."

"You would condescend to pity me?"

"As I should pity any one who loved without any possibility of a return."

"Oh, cruel Amy! but you will learn to think more kindly of me before our next meeting. I will not trouble you longer. There is Farmer Morris coming, and his wife is the most arrant gossip under the sun. Good-by, you pretty little proud creature!"

Amy vouchsafed no reply, but, delighted to be free from her companion, quickened her pace, and turned into the fields leading towards the cliffs. Farmer Morris stood for a moment or two looking after her.

"'Twould be a pity that young scapegrace of a gentleman, as he calls himself, should be after any of his evil doings with that girl," he said to himself. "She's too good for him, and if a word came to be spoken agen her good name 'twould be a mighty loss to the village, 'specially to us as has children to edicate. To see how Polly and Selina do read and spell! And then the church singing, too, its wonderful better, whatever them as sticks to the violin may say to the contrary. But it's my opinion she's a steady one, and has got more sense to keep herself from harm than poor Alice Lane and the likes of her. He'll find the game's not so easy caught this time."

\* \* \* \* \*

Miss Gordon had been more than two years an inmate of the Cliff Cottage, and the people of Rood had almost ceased to make surmises, either injurious or otherwise respecting her. She herself would have enjoyed a comparatively calm and pleasant state of existence but for the rude pertinacity of the handsome master of the Briary, who continued to prosecute her with his unwelcome attentions, notwithstanding the cold and haughty reserve with which she treated him. Her peculiar and unpro-

tected position rendered it difficult for her to keep him wholly at a distance, and though she declined all his presents, and even went so far as to forbid him to speak to her, she found it impossible either to offend him or weary him of the pursuit. He only laughed at her threats, and seemed to find a great charm in her proud, queen-like manner. Twice he had quitted Rood, several months at a time, much to Amy's satisfaction, but a powerful spell seemed to lead him back thither. He had been too much accustomed to victory to suffer himself easily to be conquered by a woman—the one woman who, above all others, had power to interest and attract him. Amy's position also regarding Edward Delafosse had become extremely painful. She felt convinced of his love, and that he was longing for the liberty of revealing it; that prudence alone induced him to remain silent; and how could he be expected to declare himself to one over whom such a veil of mystery hung? What Edward felt and suffered—how he was continually on the point of revealing his passion, and was again held back by a vague fear of—he scarcely knew what—was a secret which he believed to be wholly unsuspected by any one, least of all by her who was the object of his thoughts by day and dreams by night.

## CHAPTER IV.

---

### A PARTING, AND A GREAT FALL.

It was the middle of August, and there had been a long succession of very wet weather. The farmers grumbled in anticipation of a bad harvest, and every one else grumbled about the unseasonableness of the weather and the state of the roads. On Thursday, the 15th of August, the weather cleared up, and the following Sunday was an intensely hot day. There was scarcely any air stirring, the atmosphere was so close and oppressive that Amy found her school duties more than usually fatiguing, and the task of presiding at the organ almost a labour. When the afternoon service was over, and she had refreshed herself with a cup of Mrs. Giles's good strong tea—for that was a luxury in which the old woman especially delighted—she set out to enjoy a quiet stroll in the cool of the evening. The path through the fields over the summit of White Cliff would be the pleasantest, she thought, as it offered the best chance of getting a breath of fresh air, and as she knew that Mr. Bellew would be returning about that time to his seven o'clock dinner, and that he had a couple of friends staying with him who would probably detain him at home all the evening, there was no fear of his joining her, as he had done many times before, greatly to her annoyance. Very pleasant was the walk through the alternative fields of grass and corn, where the purple knap-weed and the pink convolvulus formed so pretty a contrast to the golden ears of grain—so pleasant that Amy wandered on much further than she had at first intended, and, wearied at last sat down to rest on a stone step under a stile. Now it happened that Mr. Delafosse had walked over to South Rood to officiate at the evening service for his vicar, who was absent for a little recreation and change of air, his health requiring him to recruit himself annually in that manner; and he, the curate, after the performance of the required duty, was walking leisurely home about eight o'clock, having also chosen the path near the cliffs as being the coolest and most agreeable. It was a mere coincidence then, no prearranged affair when he and Amy Gordon met by the stone stile leading into the large corn-field. Nevertheless, I cannot say but that it was a welcome meeting to both. Edward was certainly never happier than when looking into

those soft brown eyes and listening to the tones of that gentle voice, which, either singing or speaking, seemed to exercise a kind of magic over him ; and though I must not, of course, venture to assert that Amy was actually in love with one whose passions was not as yet openly declared, she certainly did take pleasure in his society, and feel her heart bound whenever he came near. He did not attempt to sit down by her, but stood leaning on the stile for a short time conversing with her. Then, as it was getting late, she rose to return home, and he walked by her side wherever the path was sufficiently broad to permit of two persons walking abreast, suffering her to precede him in parts where it became narrower. What was the subject of their conversation during that walk ? Years after did Delafosse try over and over again to recall every word. Amy's manner had appeared melancholy and dispirited, and she repeated an assurance she had made several times before, that it was not her intention to remain much longer at Rood. Edward had doubted the reality of her determination, and said in a joking manner that he could not let her go ; and she had replied, "Then I must go without warning you. No one knows what brought me here, and no one will know when and where I am going."

These words seemed afterwards to Edward Delafosse to contain a strange prophecy. Love was not actually spoken of, but was it not plainly enough implied in many ways, and had not Amy made it sufficiently evident that it was on Edward's account only that she contemplated going away. She saw that he loved her too well for his own happiness, and supposed that absence might teach him to forget. He had more than once almost made up his mind to act bravely, and ask that simple question, the answer to which would decide his fate for happiness on misery, but the fear that an explanation might lead to a separation was a continual check upon him. Amy's allusion to the manner of her coming to Rood, however, had emboldened him to express an earnest wish that she would place entire confidence in him.

"It would be inexcusable were I to ask out of mere curiosity," he said warmly : "but you know—you cannot help knowing—how deeply I am interested in everything that concerns you."

"I know it, Mr. Delafosse, and yet I dare not speak to you of the past, lest you should learn to doubt me as others have done."

"Pray do not speak so ! I cannot imagine there is any part of your past history which you would be ashamed to reveal—any act of yours which could make me alter my opinion—my feelings towards you. Why will you not trust me ?"

"I cannot do so—at least not now. I can only tell you that I left home—if I may call that place home which had long

ceased to be home-like to me—I left it in disgrace, Mr. Delafosse; or rather I was banished from it.”

“Then you must have been unjustly and cruelly used?”

“Unjustly accused. But perhaps I have no right to blame those who accused me; but I am very proud, Mr. Delafosse, and only to you would I confess that a shadow of suspicion had ever rested upon me.”

Edward was about to reply, and he was beginning to hope that he should succeed by degrees in gaining her whole confidence; but just at the moment Amy, who was a few inches in front of him uttered a cry of surprise.

“How strange!” she said; “I never observed this till this evening, and I could almost declare it is wider than when I passed here half-an-hour ago!”

She indicated with her foot a crack or crevice in the ground, which extended for a distance of several yards, and at one end was of considerable width.

“I have not been this way for some weeks,” replied Mr. Delafosse, “and this is certainly something new.”

“I caught my foot in it,” said Amy, “as I was passing just now, and with difficulty saved myself from falling. The corn being so high I had not perceived the fissure till I came close upon it.”

“It is owing, no doubt, to the continued rain. I suppose it will not affect Farmer Morris’s corn, but if I think of it I will mention it to him to-morrow.”

The conversation having been thus interrupted, Edward had found it wholly impossible to lead it back into its former channel; knowing as he did that Amy had no wish to return to the subject. They talked, therefore, on indifferent topics—if any topic can be considered indifferent when discussed by those who love—until they reached a spot where two paths diverged in different directions, one leading to the village, the other to the cliffs and beach. Amy held out her hand and said, “Good evening.” How cold a termination to what each felt to have been one of the love passages of a life! Edward reluctantly quitted her, for he was cautious even of acting in any way which might make her the subject of comment. Idle tongues might have been busy with their remarks if he had been observed to escort her to the cottage. He did not even linger to watch her till she was out of sight, and many times afterwards did he repent not having done so; he might have taken another look—one long last look—it would have been one more moment of ecstasy.

And what were Amy’s thoughts as she walked slowly home? Why was the expression of her face so very sad, and why did she linger regretfully as if she had been bidding a final farewell to every well-known tree, or stile, or streamlet? Did she indeed fear

lest she should never again behold Edward's face on earth, never retrace that path she had traversed so often? She was thinking, perhaps, that through life she had hitherto only given cause for sorrow, and now she had crossed this estimable young man's path only to blight and ruin his prospects and destroy his peace of mind. Had she not encouraged him to love her, and how was it possible his love for her could ever be anything but a source of pain?

During Monday Mr. Delafosse saw nothing of Amy. He was sent for early in the morning to visit a sick person at South Road; it was his intention on his return to have called on Farmer Morris to mention what he had observed in the cornfield on Sunday; but chancing to fall in with Mr. Flint, the surgeon, he accepted his offer of remaining to dine, and afterwards it quite slipped his memory. In the evening there was a small dinner-party at the Briary, and Mr. Bellew sat up rather late with his friends, and perhaps indulged a little more freely than usual in iced claret, and punch *à la Romaine*. At all events, when he retired to bed, he felt feverish and restless, and the light bed covering seemed to press upon him with an insupportable weight. He tossed his weary limbs about, and for a long while tried in vain to sleep. He could not get Amy Gordon and her haughty rejection of his attentions out of his mind for a moment, and his vanity would not permit him to think that she could be as truly indifferent to them as she professed to be. "She has a character to keep up here," he thought, "and guesses too well, no doubt, what influence she has over me. She is playing the prude just to lead me into committing myself in some way. By Jove! I could almost make up my mind to marry the girl, if I could only discover her connections to be tolerably respectable, though that would be a piece of folly which I should repent all my life perhaps. What would she say, I wonder, if I were to make her a *bond fide* proposal. There would soon be an end to her proud looks and words then. But it would be a tremendous sacrifice.

So he lay thinking till he fell asleep, and very early in the morning he had a terrible dream. He thought that he was pursuing Amy over a wide common; that he followed her till they reached the summit of a high mountain, and at last clasped her in his arms. He heard a loud harsh laugh, and the beautiful face seemed changed into that of a demon. Then came a sound, loud, sudden, and terrible, like the bursting of a volcano, or the blowing up of a powder magazine, which made him imagine the great day of account had actually arrived. He started up in bed: as it was a real sound he had heard—was it possible that he had indeed felt the bed shake under him, and heard the window frames rattle? The perspiration rolled down his face, and he actually trembled all over, though he was not

by nature timid or easily alarmed. It was a dream—nothing but a dream, of course; the final hour of judgment was not yet come, and he might continue his pleasant course of sin a few years longer at least without fear of retribution. So he reached out his hand to the small table by the bedside, helped himself to a wine-glassful of brandy, and lay back to try and sleep again.

Edward Delafosse was also restless that night, partly owing to the extreme sultriness of the weather, and partly because he—like Mr. Bellew—was annoyed by painful, anxious thoughts about Amy, though of a different kind. He perplexed himself with endeavouring to conjecture what could be the mystery concerning her, and no probable solution occurred to his imagination. Sometimes he feared lest her feeling for him should be nothing more than friendship. What if there were some insurmountable impediment to their union connected with that past history he so much desired to know? Then he called certain looks and words—indefinite, certainly, yet scarcely to be mistaken—indicating a passion warmer than friendship; and was she not too pure, too high-minded, to display such a feeling herself, or to encourage it in him, if there were no possibility of hope—if she were already engaged or married? Of the disgrace to which she alluded he thought little, being convinced that no real disgrace could attach to her name even though suspicion had rested upon it. As he lay musing he determined, as soon as possible, to speak those words which must lead to a final decision. If she loved and accepted him she could no longer withhold her entire confidence; if they could not prudently marry immediately they could wait patiently for a time. Was he not in expectation of a good living some day?"

It was his impression that he did not sleep at all during the night, but probably he dozed at intervals for a short time, as we often do during disturbed nights without being aware of it. Whether sleeping or waking, however, he was startled by a sudden crash as of a tremendous peal of thunder, which shook the bed and the whole house, as it seemed to him. He raised himself up and listened, and was about to lie down again, when another deafening crash caused him to spring out of bed in astonishment and alarm. He went to the window and drew up the blind; the moon, nearly at full was sailing peacefully among a few fleecy white clouds. All was perfectly calm and still. The sound, whatever it was, had disturbed the other inmates of the house, for he heard his landlady and her daughter moving and talking in the room overhead, and opening and shutting the window. He opened his door and listened, then returned to bed again; it was thunder probably, or it might have been a slight earthquake—the weather had been peculiarly oppressive and warm—he would wait and see if there would be a repetition

of the phenomenon. But the sound was not repeated, and as the pale moonlight streamed into the room through the open window, and all was quiet and still, his thoughts returned into their former channel, and he probably fell asleep again.

But Mr. Bellew and the curate were not the only persons among the dwellers in Rood who had been startled by that terrible sound during the night. Poor blind Naomi, whose sense of hearing was particularly acute, thought that a thunder-bolt had fallen in the very midst of the village. Bridges, the landlord of the Cat and Fiddle, who was an old Peninsular hero, dreamed that the Emperor Napoleon III. had come with a big fleet to invade England, and that the cannons were booming from fifty great ships of war at anchor in the bay. The children suddenly awakened from their sleep had started up screaming, and mothers in their anxiety to pacify them, had taken less notice of the cause of alarm. Farmer Morris declared he had felt his crazy old house totter and had there been a repetition of the shock should certainly have removed his wife and family into the new barn. There was not a person in the village who had not been alarmed, except old deaf Sally Harrison, and she had complained of a rumbling in her head, which made her dream that her rogue of a grandson Billy was wheeling a wheelbarrow full of potatoes right across her face.

Before many people had had time to compare their sensations and experiences the cause of the noise which had created so much alarm was discovered. Two boys who had gone early to gather mushrooms on the cliffs returned in breathless consternation. Talking both at once, in a confused, incoherent manner, they contrived at last to make it understood that a strange catastrophe had happened. White Cliff had fallen ! the great rock which, like a hoary giant, had weathered the storms of so many ages—the huge mass had fallen forward, covering the little beach below, and forming a wide chasm, separating the corn-field in two parts. It is scarcely possible to imagine the confusion that prevailed over that part of the coast for a considerable distance ; great fragments of rock, masses of earth and stones piled heap upon heap in the wildest disorder—the Elephant and Mitre entirely disappeared—immense pieces of limestone, still mantled with dark green ivy, standing in the midst of the sea, and detached patches of yellow corn appearing here and there, like diminutive fields, in different directions. Where was the Cottage on the cliff ? Not a vestige remained of it, except a portion of the little shed where Dame Giles had been in the habit of keeping her stock of firewood, and part of the potato plot, which curiously enough, had escaped the general destruction, and remained half way up the rock in a spot now wholly inaccessible. The old woman's cat had contrived to escape, and was found wandering about in the village. In con-



trast to the desolation everywhere apparent on the land, the sea was remarkably smooth and blue, the weather calm and fine, the sun shining down out of a cloudless sky, tinging the waving corn with gold, and the rippling waves with silver. Crowds of men, women, and children, were assembled, gazing at the changed scene, and discussing it after their various manners; and the jackdaws so summarily disturbed hovered about the ruins of their homes in alarm and bewilderment.

Two men apart from the rest stood together upon a large fragment of rock gazing up in the direction of the spot where the cottage had lately stood. It was Mr. Bellew, of the Briary, and the curate of Rood. They had not formerly been great friends, but they seemed brothers in misfortune now. Each was eagerly desirous that every attempt should be made to ascertain the fate of those who were supposed to have perished, and numbers of hands were soon busy at work making excavations among the ruins, but no signs of the bodies could be found. Some remnants of the furniture were indeed picked up, pieces of wood, and fragments of broken crockery. Rafters, which had formed part of the building, were seen floating on the sea, and it was likely enough the bodies had also been washed into it, if they did not lie deep under the immense masses of rubbish it was impossible to remove. Meanwhile the two young men stood apart, and compared notes respecting their last intercourse with Amy. Mr. Bellew had not seen her since Sunday morning; he had tried to join her in returning from church, but she had avoided him, and walked home with Miss Morris. Edward related his meeting with her in the cliff fields, and their observation of the crevice, which in fact had been but the commencement of the wide chasm which now formed a deep rocky ravine extending for nearly fifty yards; but he made no allusion to the nature of the conversation which had taken place during that never-to-be-forgotten walk. How he reproached himself for the careless manner in which he had regarded the circumstance, for the stupidity which prevented his perceiving the threatened danger to his beloved. Even when startled by the shock of the landslip during the night it had not occurred to him to imagine her safety in any way concerned by it, though she had been in his thoughts but the previous moment. Now he called himself a fool and a madman for not having at once guessed the fatal truth.

Weeks passed by: the corn was ripened and gathered; green herbage began already to grow over the sides of the opened chasm, and the tide had already dashed many times among the shattered fragments of rock, discovering occasionally bricks and wood and pieces of furniture, battered cooking utensils and broken crockery, but revealing nothing of those who were supposed to be buried under those terrible ruins. No inquiry had

been made for Miss Gordon, though it was conjectured she had friends who were aware of her place of abode, as several times during the previous month she had received newspapers and letters through the post, a circumstance which had been remarked, as during the earlier part of her residence at the cottage she had appeared to have no correspondent. In the accounts of the catastrophe in the newspapers it was simply mentioned that an old woman named Giles, the owner of the cottage, and Miss Gordon, the schoolmistress of Rood, who lodged with her, were supposed to have perished.

Rood was become a very dreary place to the two young men, but very differently were they affected by the common catastrophe. Mr. Bellew had lost his only source of interest in the village, and felt thoroughly disgusted at being disappointed in a matter on which he had set his heart, or rather his fancy—at losing the object to gain which he had wasted so much time in a dull country village and deprived himself of so many other sources of pleasure. He advertised the Briary for sale, and began to look out for some nice place in a distant country where he could get some good shooting, and entertained some serious thoughts about settling down, and making up his mind to marry his pretty cousin Geraldine, who had been dying for him ever since she took to long dresses, but was not quite dead nevertheless. She had somewhere about twelve thousand pounds, and, after all, perhaps he might consider himself lucky in being miraculously saved from making a fool of himself. As for Delafosse, he felt that he had lost his only hope in life; the future would be but a dull round of duty, and he struggled for submission to the inscrutable degrees of a Higher Will, which had seen fit to take from him all he cared to live for by a visitation so sudden and terrible. How trifling now seemed all those things which he had looked upon but lately as possible impediments to his happiness! how little it would have mattered who and what Amy's connections were—whether a marriage between two young people almost equally poor would have been prudent or desirable—whether his beloved mother in Cumberland would have approved of it! Could Amy have stood once more by his side, could she have loved him, he would have made her his own, he thought, in spite of all objections, real or imaginary. To stay at Rood was impossible. He could have borne, perhaps, to remain near the spot where Amy was laid, to visit her quiet grave in the churchyard, had she died as people ordinarily die, had she been “visited with the visitation of all men,” and buried solemnly in the hope of a joyful resurrection; but to gaze on that huge, rocky monument, and to speculate where and how deep her crushed body lay, seemed to drive him to madness. He remained, therefore, only so long as his duty to his rector rendered it necessary, and then set out to visit his relations in Cumberland previous to seeking a curacy elsewhere.

## CHAPTER V.

### MISS BEATRICE.

Twenty years of Edward Delafosse's life had glided away. He had been a wanderer from place to place, officiating as curate, now in some densely crowded city, now in a retired village or small country town. Either he had been unfortunate, and found it difficult to agree with those with whom he had been associated in the clerical office, or he was naturally restless and desirous of change ; but at last the living which had been promised to him, and to which he had been looking forward, became vacant, and he was duly installed vicar of the parish of Aldergrove in one of the midland counties. Here he was universally liked and respected, the only circumstance not in his favour being that he had no gentle helpmate to assist him in his duties, and, what was a worse fault still in the estimation of some other young and middle-aged ladies of the place, seemed by no means disposed to choose a wife from amongst them. In fact, he had become rather stout, fond of ease and luxury, though, to do him justice, not selfishly so, and had settled down into old bachelor ways and become methodical and fidgety, even so much so as to produce a murmur sometimes from the lips of his attached and usually uncomplaining housekeeper, and cause her to lament in confidential conversation with the housemaid, that poor dear master was so full of his items." When the good vicar, mounted on his little fat black pony, trotted soberly down the principal street of Aldergrove, they were pronounced to be a very suitable pair ; and it was more than probable that had Mr. Delafosse been compelled to climb the steep path at the Cliffs at Rood, as in his days of hard work and sea bathing, he would have found his respiration unpleasantly affected by the effort.

Now in the town of Aldergrove lived an old gentleman of the name of Holmes, with whom the vicar soon after his arrival became friendly and intimate. Mr. Holmes was a solicitor, but had some years before retired from business. He was a widower, aged, and infirm, and the sudden liking he conceived for Mr. Delafosse was considered remarkable, as he had long evinced a misanthropical disposition, and declined to associate with any of his neighbours. Between him and the late vicar no very friendly feeling had existed, and perhaps for that reason he was the more ready to welcome and appreciate his successor. One Sunday

afternoon the old man was seized with an apoplectic fit, and pronounced to be dying. Late in the evening the vicar was summoned to his bedside to administer the last consolations of religion, but the patient was not sufficiently conscious to benefit by them. Mr. Delafosse read a portion of the service for the Visitation of the Sick, but perceiving the sick man to be in no state to listen, he closed the book and stood for a few moments in silence by the bedside.

"Do stop by him a little while with me, sir," said Mrs. Crisp, the housekeeper. "The doctor has been called away to another patient, and the doctor's assistant is gone back to the surgery to make up some prescription for poor master. I don't well like to be left alone with him, and I dare not leave the house to fetch in any person to help. Do stay a bit, sir."

"I will remain, certainly, Mrs. Crisp, till Mr. Bagwell's assistant arrives," replied the vicar, seating himself in the great chair near the bed. The sick man seemed restless and uneasy; he was not sleeping, but apparently perfectly unconscious of anything which was passing around him, and he groaned frequently, and uttered faint exclamations of grief or alarm.

"Poor Beatrice!" he repeated several times. "I loved Margaret dearly; why was I so cruel to her child Beatrice! Where is Beatrice?"

"He seems to have something on his mind, Mrs. Crisp: it is very distressing to listen to him."

"Yes, indeed, sir; my poor master has never been happy, so to speak, for years past, ever since Miss Isabella married and my mistress died. It's been dismal enough for him here. Then what with his nephew turning out so bad, and everybody coming to learn about Miss Beatrice's innocence, his spirits have been sadly affected at times."

"Who is Miss Beatrice? He seems to be grieving in some way about her now."

"Oh, sir, I didn't know but what you knew all about it: but I suppose Aldergrove folks had ceased to talk about the nine days' wonder before you came here, and master was apt to be close with every one. Miss Beatrice was my master's stepdaughter, sir, and she was falsely accused, and as good as turned out of doors at last; and whether she's dead or whether she's living it's not for me to say, but we never knew where the poor thing went, or how she managed to live. If it wasn't for the fact of Miss Beatrice being always so good and so right-minded, and held up, as I may say, by religious principle—which she always was in spite of many disadvantages in her bringing up—it's awful to think what the poor creature might have fallen into, cast loose upon the world with only a ten-pound note in her pocket. But Lord! sir, my master's worse, I fear. I'm sure I wish the young gentleman from Mr. Bagwell's would come."

The old man appeared to labour more and more every moment for breath, and the housekeeper hastened to place another pillow under his head, while Mr. Delafosse went downstairs at her request to search for some brandy. The spirit-stand stood on the table in the breakfast room or library, where Mr. Holmes had been accustomed to sit. As the vicar was about to pour a small portion of brandy into a wine-glass, the doctor's assistant opened the front door and entered without knocking : he had brought a nurse with him to relieve the housekeeper in her attendance on the sick man.

"I knew Mrs. Crisp would be busy upstairs, and made free to come in," he said. "Thanks, Mr. Delafosse, I will take the brandy up with me, if you please."

He took the bottle, and quitted the room in a hasty manner natural to him, which in the present instance was to be commended, the case perhaps being one of life and death. The vicar's presence was no longer required, yet he lingered, passing up and down the room, examining every article of furniture in it, and at last seated himself in the luxurious easy-chair by the fire. Somehow he seemed unwilling to take his departure. A kind of painful curiosity had been excited in his mind by the housekeeper's recital, and he longed to hear more. Presently Mrs. Crisp descended the stairs with stealthy steps, and entered the room.

"La, sir ! I thought you were gone. I hope you have not been putting yourself to inconvenience on my account ?"

"Not all. How does your master seem now ?"

"He is gone off into a kind of sleep, and Betsy Barnes is going to sit by him for an hour or two. I came down to get a cup of tea and rest myself a bit."

"Quite right ; you must keep your strength. I am glad Mr. Holmes is become quiet and calm."

"Oh yes, and so am I. I can't bear to hear him go on calling so on Miss Beatrice."

"I want to hear more about Miss Beatrice ; what you have said has interested me very much. Was she very young ?"

"Yes, about eighteen when she went away. She had all the thought of a woman when she was a child, and yet was as simple as a child in her ways and tastes after she was a woman. That was her work table, sir, with the great red bag in which she used to keep her odds and ends of finery for dressing dolls when she was little, and the things to make up clothes for poor children afterwards—and they called her a hypocrite for that ! Those were her books, sir—that whole row on the top shelf of the book case—and it's my belief they've never been touched, not so much as to have the cobwebs wiped off of them ever since she's been gone. Miss Isabella never cared much for books, and scarcely looked into one, except it might be a novel some-

times, after she'd finished her education ; and I don't think poor master cared to meddle with anything Miss Beatrice left. He was mighty particular about his books, and never let one of us servants touch them ; there were five servants kept when the mistress was alive, but now there's only me and a boy."

Mr. Delafosse was standing near the book case, and, scarcely thinking of what he was about, he reached down one of the dusty volumes and opened it. It was a handsomely-bound edition of Scott's "Lady of the Lake." He turned to the fly-leaf, on which was inscribed in a delicate female hand : "Beatrice Amy Gordon Macaire. The gift of her mother."

"Can this be her name written here—Beatrice Amy Gordon ? Tell me more, Mrs Crisp. Tell me the whole of that young lady's history—for I believe, indeed, that I have an especial interest in hearing it."

"La sir ! You didn't surely know Miss Beatrice ?"

"I did know her—too well for my own peace. But I must not be so selfish as to detain you now, much as I am longing to hear. You require rest."

"Oh ! no, sir. I'd rather a great deal sit here, and have a bit of chat with you, than lie down, for I'm sure I couldn't sleep if I was to try. I'll make the tea, and perhaps you wouldn't be above taking a cup with me ; and if you can tell me anything about poor Miss Beatrice I should be very glad to hear it."

"Indeed what I have to tell can only be painful news."

"She didn't come to harm, sir, I trust—not disgrace of any kind ? Did she die, sir ?"

"She died—that is if you and I are speaking of the same person."

"That's right ! If the Lord took her there was none more fit to be taken—she's happy, that's certain. Please, sir, to tell me how you happened to know her, and what she died of, and where she lies, poor thing, for I'm very anxious to hear."

Mr. Delafosse was seated by the table, his elbows resting upon it, and his face concealed by his hands. Was it to hide the emotion he felt ashamed to display ?

"Tell me all you know first, and then you shall hear, though its a subject very painful to me to speak of."

"Well, sir, I'll begin at the beginning as it were, for I suppose you don't know anything about the family ?

Mrs. Crisp settled herself in an arm chair opposite to Mr. Delafosse, and having poured out two cups of tea and handed the plate of buttered toast to her visitor, commenced her narrative :

"There was a Captain Macaire, sir, a very good gentleman, who had served in the wars and came to Aldergrove in very bad health. He had a very pretty wife, and a little girl, the beautifullest child as every you saw—such large, soft, brown eyes, and

such a quantity of dark hair, with just a shade of gold about it, falling in long curls over her shoulder. I don't well know what brought them here first, for the captain's relations all lived in Scotland—and a very proud family they were, I've heard say, but not over rich—and I believe Miss Macaire's family was Scotch also. They took the pretty cottage near the turnpike called Woodbine Lodge, and the captain was under the care of Dr. Reed, a physician who lived here then, and was very much thought of. Well, the poor gentleman died here, and Mrs. Macaire was left with nothing more, I believe, than the pension she had from Government. My master, Mr. Holmes, had been a great deal concerned with the captain about business, and this had led to his being intimate at the house; and very soon after the captain's death he began making up to the widow. She refused him point blank at first, so they say, and wouldn't have anything to do with him, and after a time she went away to London; but master was very much in love, and wouldn't be put off so easily. He followed her there, and at last prevailed on her to marry him, he promising solemnly to be a kind step-father to her child. It was all very well as long as she lived, poor thing, and she was a very good lady, and brought up Miss Beatrice to be as good as herself, and everybody loved both of them. Mrs. Holmes was a very clever lady, too, and could play and sing beautiful, and knew ever so many languages, I've been told, and she taught her daughter, or had her taught, the same. But when the poor young lady was fourteen years old, and just come to the age when, perhaps, she more than ever required a mother's care, Mrs. Holmes fell away in a rapid decline, and was buried close by her first husband under the great yew tree on the north side of the churchyard. It's a dismal place, sir, and for my part, I can't see what business yew trees have in churchyards. We want something to cheer us there, and to remind us of the happiness the blessed are to enjoy beyond the grave, and not gloomy objects to make us feel all the more hopeless and sad. Well, her mother's death of course was a terrible grief to Miss Beatrice, and it was the terriblest misfortune that could have happened to the poor child, for though Mr. Holmes had been kind enough in her mamma's lifetime, he didn't love her as if she had been his own child; and, strange to say, he married again within the year, and the lady he choose was the last person one should ever have thought likely to succeed the first Mrs. Holmes, for she was as different a person as could be. She was a widow, too, and handsome, and her good looks, I suppose, did something towards attracting my poor master, though I saw enough to know that she tried might and main to get him into the humour to marry her. She had a daughter by her first husband also, a pretty elegant young lady enough, and two years older than Miss Beatrice, but not nearly so

amiable in my opinion. The second Mrs. Holmes was never properly kind to Miss Beatrice. In fact, she never could bear her in her heart, and was always insinuating unkind things about her to master. Somehow she managed to get a great influence over him, though he didn't love her half as well as he had loved his former wife, I feel certain ; and in time he got to believe all the cruel things they said about Miss Beatrice, making out she set herself up to be better and cleverer than every one else, and that she was sly and hypocritical ; and he got to speak quite snappish and cross to the poor girl, and not to pay half as much attention to her as he did to Miss Isabella, and Miss Isabella herself was not at all sisterly with Miss Beatrice, and seemed to think she had no right to dress as well as herself, or to have as much spent on her for amusement. Between them the poor thing led a sorrowful life, though she never complained to any one, but I believe she loved me, and liked to talk with me sometimes about her poor dear mother that was gone, and the place of happiness where she'd hoped to join her some day ; and often she'd go quite alone into the churchyard, to sit by the grave, but then she took care to slip out unperceived, because Mrs. Holmes always sneered at her for it, and said she did it out of display, to make people believe she was more tender-hearted and sentimental than others. Well, what made matters worse was the arrival of young Mr. Aylmer, Sir Thomas Aylmer's son at Aylmer Hall. He was the eldest son, and heir of course to the title, and a sight of land and money as well, and he took a wonderful fancy to our two young ladies. I say the two, because he liked to walk and ride and talk compliments with both, but its my opinion his fancy was most taken at first with Miss Beatrice. Mrs. Holmes was in a sad fright lest he should fall down right in love with her, and make her an offer, and she did all she could to keep them apart, and to bring him and her own daughter together, and she made it so evident that I felt quite convinced she would manage to get poor Miss Beatrice out of the way by hook or by crook. Now I must mention, sir, that Mr. Holmes had a young man, a nephew of his own, as clerk in his office, and he slept here, and boarded regular with the family. He was called Ewart, and a terrible young scamp he was, though at that time master thought much of him. The very first day he came I saw how much he was taken up with Miss Beatrice. He couldn't take his eyes off her, and he'd a strange under way of looking that I didn't well like, and I could see she was not inclined to like him. I was waiting at table that day because Thomas was ill—Miss Beatrice was sitting opposite to him, and there was only a dish of iced mutton between them—and I couldn't help noticing his way of looking. Servants often see a great deal more of what's going on in a family than the master and mistress do. I saw that



young man was in love if ever a man was, and that he would have given the world for some sign of love from her, but she never could abide him. For my part I was glad of it, for he wasn't at all a nice young man, as was pretty well proved afterwards. I saw that she avoided him as much as possible, and that he persisted in making himself disagreeable to her in spite of all she could say or do. Why he used to try to kiss her, sir! Many times in the passage he's stood hidden away waiting for her to come by, and then he would lay hold of her and act quite rude. I've seen it several times myself, and it wasn't a bit of good for me to speak, or for her to go and complain to Mr. or Mrs. Holmes. My mistress always took young Ewart's part, and made out that Miss Beatrice was bold and all sorts, and she had no one to protect her. But a worse thing was to come. It seemed, though we servants did not know it till afterwards, that Mr. Holmes had been for some time continually missing small sums of money—a sovereign or half-a-sovereign at a time, or some loose silver, as it may chance—and he hadn't said anything about it only to my mistress, hoping to catch the thief in the act perhaps. At last larger sums began to disappear, and he became very suspicious of us servants; but still he kept it all close. One day he had received a large sum of money from some client—about a hundred and fifty pounds, all in notes—and he'd marked all the notes, and taken the numbers of them for precaution's sake, and locked them up in a desk in the office, and put the key in his pocket. When he went to count them over a short time after, there was forty pounds missing. Well, sir, of course there was a regular commotion in the house. We servants were all had up and questioned, and of course we all denied, being quite innocent. Then my master said every one's boxes must be searched. We were very indignant, and bade him search by all means, for we felt quite certain none of us was in the wrong, and he said it should be all fair, for he meant to have the whole house searched, the young ladies' rooms and all. Well, what do you think, sir? The notes were found carefully hidden away in Miss Beatrice's linen drawer, packed in one by one among a number of pocket handkerchiefs. I can hardly tell you what happened afterwards. Mrs. Holmes was furious, and she worked my master up, and made him almost mad against Miss Beatrice. She insisted the wicked girl should not remain in the house to corrupt her dear daughter, and master declared he would not keep her under his roof any longer. It was of no kind of use for her to plead innocence, and indeed she did not try to say much in her own defence, which they said told greatly against her. It's my opinion she saw at once it was a plot laid to ruin her, and wondered how they could dare to suspect her under any circumstances. They put the poor thing to the shame of being taken before a magistrate, but nothing

could be proved against her, because the desk had not been broken open, and no one could tell how she had come by the key which the master kept in his own pocket. I never could tell myself how it was done, but it's my belief that young Ewart did it, and that he'd been stealing away money for ever so long, to spend in all sorts of bad ways ; and that when he was afraid of being found out, and could not venture to change the notes on account of their being marked, he hid them in Miss Beatrice's drawer that the blame might fall on her. He had got to hate her I knew, almost as much as he had loved her before, because she showed very plainly how much she disliked him, and treated him with a kind of contempt and disdain. Mrs. Holmes was wicked enough — God forgive me for speaking so of one that is gone to her own account—but she wasn't quite bad enough to have any hand in it herself, I feel certain, though she did rejoice in heart to have the poor girl disgraced and sent away : as for Miss Isabella she was quite above doing any such thing, for all she and Miss Beatrice never got on together. My master would have been willing to wait till they could hear of some situation for her, but Miss Beatrice said she would rather go at once, and my mistress said that was best, because they could not with clear consciences give her a character. So she packed up a few of her things in a little bag and went away, and master gave her ten pounds to take with her, and told her to write if she wanted more ; but she never wrote, and has never been heard of from that day to this. When she wished me good-bye, poor thing, she was crying bitterly, and I said, ' My dear, I suppose you will go to your relations in Scotland ? ' and she said, ' Never, never, while I have this stain on my character ! I am going to a friend who will, I think, be kind to me for my father's sake, and put me in the way of getting some situation. But I will not tell even you where I am going, because I wish to hide myself from all the world.' She knew, poor dear, how apt we old women are to gossip, and thought I might let it out, without meaning to do it to my master and mistress. Well, after a time, we ceased to talk about Miss Beatrice ; they said she was too much ashamed of herself to write, and I feared I don't know what for her, because that money could not last very long. I don't know whether she'd ever had a pension from Government like her mother, but if she had I suppose it must have been stopped when she grew up, for she was always considered to be quite dependent upon her step-father. My mistress's plans succeeded so well that Mr. Henry Aylmer married Miss Isabella, and a very grand wedding it was ; but I don't think the marriage turned out very happy, for Miss Isabella had a temper of her own, and the gentleman was inclined to be gay, and too fond of other ladies after he was married, they say, so they don't lead a very sucking-dove kind of life I fancy. They'll be here,

no doubt, if anything should happen to poor master ; they're like the rest of the world, and will come to see what they can get. But I was going to tell you, sir, soon after Miss Isabella's marriage, Mr. Ewart went away all of a sudden. Then it was found out he'd taken a large sum of money with him—absconded I think they call it—and was off to foreign parts, no one knew where ; and when things came to be looked into, master found out he'd been robbing him right and left for ever so long ; for he placed great confidence in him, being his nephew, you know, and had given up the management of the business almost entirely to him for some time past. Then everybody knew Miss Beatrice was innocent, and who was the thief, though they had no means of discovering what was become of the poor girl, and if you can tell me anything about her, sir, I shall be glad and grateful."

## CHAPTER VI.

---

### MARRIED AT LAST.

Mr. Delafosse had sat during the whole of the housekeeper's recital, his face covered by his hands, nor had he interrupted it by a single observation or question ; indeed, good Mrs. Crisp was so much interested in her own story that, had her companion fallen asleep, she would scarcely have been aware of it. When she ceased speaking, and seemed to await some communication from him, he felt at a loss what to say. If he could have spoken of Amy Gordon as having died of fever or lingering consumption, or any other disease by which the young are liable to be carried off, and laid in a corner of some quiet churchyard peacefully to rest, it would have been painful certainly for him to speak and for her to listen ; but in what words could he tell this affectionate and faithful old servant of the dreadful fate which had overtaken her young mistress, and of the terrible monument which marked her last resting place ? Should he attempt to explain all this to the dying man upstairs, who had acted so unfatherly a part towards the child committed to his care by a loving mother, and render still more bitter the pangs of remorse under which he was still suffering ? Would there be an interval of consciousness before death which would afford time for making the painful communication ? His doubts were set at rest, however, on this last point by the arrival of a summons to Mrs. Crisp to hasten to the sick room. A sudden change for the worse had taken place, and before another half hour had passed away the rich lawyer, Mr. Josiah Holmes, had ceased to exist.

Then the vicar quitted the house, determining not to make his revelation to the housekeeper—until after the funeral, at least. That event was fixed to take place on the eighth day after the old gentleman's decease, and, as Mrs. Crisp had prognosticated, Mr. and Mrs. Aylmer came down from town to be present at the ceremony and hear the will read. Mrs. Aylmer did not follow the corpse to the grave, but her husband attended as chief mourner, there being no nearer connection present to act that part. Probably it was only acting a part as far as the young baronet that was to be was concerned, and the truest mourner was the old housekeeper, who had been attached to her master in spite of all his faults.

After the ceremony was over Mr. Delafosse accompanied Mr. Aylmer into the dining room, where a sumptuous luncheon had been prepared. Two ladies in deep mourning were seated to-

gether at the end of the room, and both rose at the approach of the gentlemen. Dr. Delafosse could not but feel some curiosity to see Miss Isabella, of whom he had heard so much in connection with his lost Amy, though he did not feel very favourably disposed towards her. He glanced from one lady to the other as they came forward, and then stood immovable, earnestly gazing at *one*. She, too, seemed strangely moved by the sight of him ; she uttered a faint exclamation, and laid hold of the back of a chair for support.

"My dear Isabel, this is our worthy vicar, Mr. Delafosse ; allow me to introduce my wife and her sister, Miss Macaire."

But no introduction was needed. In spite of the lapse of years it was impossible to mistake that sweet face, those gentle brown eyes. Edward forgot for the moment all the dreary interval of years when death had seemed to separate them, and fancied himself again the young ardent lover on the cliffs at Rood.

"Amy !"

He had taken both her hands, and was gazing into her face as if his very existence depended on the blissful inconceivable fact which he read there. Amy was living ! Oh ! the rapture of that moment. Dearer, far dearer even than before, did she seem now, the lost and found. So overwhelming was the surprise and joy that it was some time before it occurred to him to inquire how she had escaped the awful fate which had befallen her aged hostess, and Miss Macaire herself had never even heard of such a catastrophe taking place. She only knew that she and Edward Delafosse had been parted twenty years, and that they were united again. Who shall say that we lose so great a measure of the ardour of romantic enthusiasm when the bright season of youth is passed away ? There are some, at least, who cling to the memory of old hopes and old loves even on the brink of the grave. Edward and Amy had loved truly and well, and the changes that time had wrought were overlooked in the joy of the happy meeting.

It is now necessary to explain how the life of Miss Macaire had been saved, and what had become of her during that long separation. She had seen, soon after the commencement of their intercourse, that Edward loved her, and before very long she felt convinced that his attachment to her was sufficiently strong to become the cause of a life's happiness or misery. She was aware also that her own happiness was at stake, and willingly would she have become Edward's wife, if he had declared himself explicitly, and if she had felt herself at liberty to marry at all. She saw that he hesitated either from motives of prudence and a scruple to ask her to share poverty with him, or on account of the mystery in which her past history was involved. Mr. Bellew's attentions in the meanwhile were

beginning to inspire her with real terror—she was so entirely unprotected, and knew so little of the world ; and at last she formed the determination to escape from Rood. “I will free myself from that man,” she thought, “and I will no longer expose Edward to temptation. He must not encumber himself with a wife, still less with one whose character is not stainless. He shall never see me again, at least until my innocence has been clearly proved, and he may learn to conquer the feelings I have awakened, and continue the even course of his blameless life usefully and happily.”

She had several times hinted to him her intention of leaving the neighbourhood, but he of course persisted in opposing such an idea, and she at last made up her mind to depart secretly and spare him and herself the pain of a bitter parting, for she knew if it came to that he would feel compelled to avow his love, and try to elaim promise from her. She caused an advertisement to be inserted in the *Times*, offering her services as companion to a lady about to travel abroad, for she wished to remove herself as far as possible from Aldergrove and from Rood. In answer to her application she received a letter from the widow of an officer, who was on the point of setting out for Brussels, and wished for a young lady companion who could speak German and French. As Amy in her reply mentioned the name of her father's old friend, General Cameron, in search of whom she had first come to Rood, and who then resided at Brussels, and the lady happened to be intimately acquainted with that gentleman's family, the matter was soon arranged, and Miss Gordon—as she then called herself—was required to go up immediately to town to join her new friend.

As this might not have chanced to be quite convenient, Mrs. Newman had kindly offered to pay a quarter's salary in advance. Amy had decided on leaving the box containing the greater part of her small wardrobe for the benefit of Mrs. Giles, and taking with her only a small reticule which she could carry in her hand. She could easily supply herself with all she needed in London, and her wardrobe not having been replenished during her residence at Rood, was scarcely worth carrying away. Old Salome was the only person made acquainted, in confidence, with her intended departure. Chance brought her and Edward Delafosse together on that memorable Sunday evening, nor did she suspect that there was a possibility of his returning that way, and go with the hope of seeing and speaking to him once more ?

Early on the Monday, before it was quite light, she had wished Mrs. Giles good-bye, little foreseeing the sad fate which would soon overtake the poor old woman, and set out alone for the station with sadder feelings than those with which she had quitted the house of her stepfather two years before. Mrs. Newman received her very kindly in London, and they sailed

two days afterwards for the continent. At Brussels she was delighted to meet with General Cameron and his family, to whom she confided the history of her expulsion from home, feeling assured that they would not believe in her guilt, as was indeed the case.

For several years she remained with Mrs. Newman, travelling with her over the most beautiful parts of the continent and residing with her afterwards in London. There Mrs. Newman died, leaving her beloved and faithful companion a considerable part of her fortune.

Since that time Amy had been an inmate of the house of General Cameron, who had also returned to reside in England ; and in London she had chanced to meet with Miss Isabella Aylmer and her husband. From them she first heard of the discovery of Mr. Ewart's guilt and of her own innocence. Soon afterwards [the news came to Mr. and Mrs. Aylmer of the alarming illness of old Mr. Holmes, and at the request of her stepsister, who seemed anxious by words and acts of kindness to blot out all painful memories of the past, Amy consented to accompany them to Aldergrove. She felt some desire to see once more the old man who had been the husband of her mother, and to hear from his own lips that he no longer believed in her guilt ; but she had arrived only to find him a corpse, and there had been no time previously to apprise him that the lost Beatrice had been discovered at last. When the will was read it was clearly proved that his feelings towards her latterly had been those of affection and kindness, for he had left a considerable sum in trust for her in case she should be found, and if she were dead the money was to be divided among several public charities.

Beatrice Macaire was a rich woman now, but she only rejoiced in that circumstance because it would enable her to benefit others, and especially him she loved. Young ladies and gentlemen might feel inclined to laugh, and talk contemptuously about old maids and old bachelors, and fancy the wedding of the middle-aged parson and his middle-aged bride a very humdrum affair, but those who have been united in heart in the days of their youth, and have continued to love steadily and warmly, year after year, can never grow old in each others eyes, and Amy in her dress of silver grey silk and her simple white bonnet was a far more lovely object to Edward Delafosse than that sylph-like creature, enveloped in a cloud of blonde and white satin and roses, whom he had assisted to bind with the hymeneal fetters but a few days before.

So, after years of trial and separation, Edward and Amy—as he still continued to call her—became a loving husband and wife, and the good people of Aldergrove ceased to wonder why their handsome good-tempered vicar had never got married.











8



7









7



8